



Director's Notes and Visual References

Gods and Robots is the story of Ricky, a time-traveling robot from the future who has journeyed to the year 1983 to find the source of artificial intelligence. That source, Ricky believes, is the robot god.

As it turns out, the source can be found in the malfunctioning Atari of a young boy named Ben. When Ricky ends up trapped in the CB radio of Ben's glamorous disco neighbor Queen Bee, he enlists her help on his quest. They soon learn, though, that finding god is not quite as easy as it sounds.



Robots

Humanity's fascination with robots dates back to the earliest stages of our own technological exploration. Before artificial intelligence was even possible, its existence was explored in many memorable books, movies, and TV shows. Metropolis, Lost In Space, Buck Rogers, Star Wars, Short Circuit (just to name a few) all drew great energy from the dynamics between humans and their electronic counterparts.

I believe that much of our fascination with robots comes from the fact that in creating them, we are in essence playing god. We are making sentient beings in our own image and projecting onto them our greatest hopes and deepest fears.

Any life form that springs from us is going to share our spiritual dilemmas and uncertainties, and arguing over where we came from and why has been a source of tension since the dawn of human history. In Ricky's quest, I see a path tread by many people who have wondered what life was all about and why so many of us insist on fighting over it.

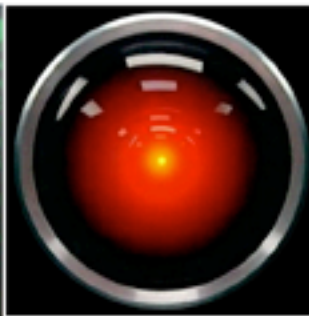




The Computer Era: Promise and Fear

I set the movie in 1983 because it was a time when computing was in the forefront of our national consciousness. Personal computers were just starting to be an attainable technology for the middle class; Atari and other gaming systems were teaching an entire generation how to interact with electronics; even pop music was changing as guitars were replaced by synthesizers and a new "all electronic" era of music beckoned on the horizon.

Computers promised to serve and entertain us in a way that would transform society. But with change comes anxiety, and movies like *War Games* and *Terminator* showed the uncertainty many people felt about a future dominated by electronics. Technology could liberate, but as history tells us, it could also destroy.





The 80's

To tell a story set in the 80's, I want to use the form of the 80's comedy. I feel that the media output of an era reflects that time's culture and beliefs, so by using a prevalent form, we take people back to that time in a visceral way. The form transmits meaning and captures a moment in time, as we see in the nouveau Blaxpotation cult hit *Black Dynamite*, Todd Hayne's stunning melodrama *Far From Heaven*, and last year's sensation *The Artist*.

Mainstream comedies of the 80s were campy and relied on a lot of stereotypes and gags for their humor. Despite the silliness, there is some real social commentary, and I always loved the fact that films like *Sixteen Candles*, *Short Circuit*, *The Toy* and *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* all championed the outsider.

Gods and Robots is an 80's comedy reimagined as I wish they could be: the stock characters are all there, but with a sense of story and depth they used to lack; the fashion is the same, but the camera angles more dynamic; the social commentary is there, but with more contemporary context. It's a nod to the form, but with modern ideas and aesthetics.



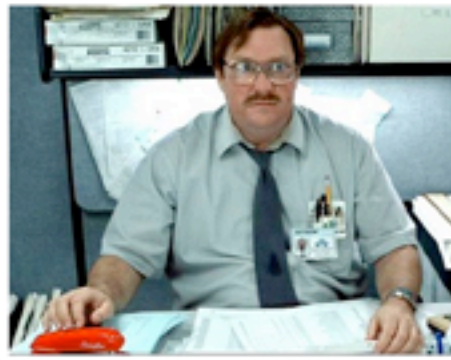


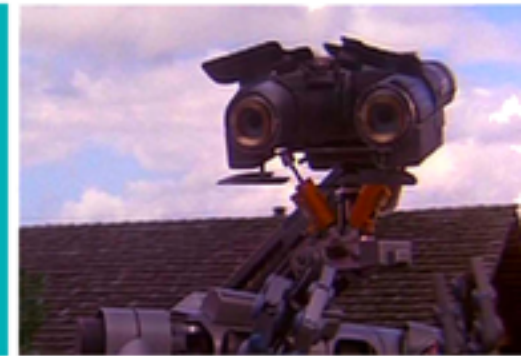
CAMP: It's not a four letter word

OK, so technically camp is a four letter word. But that doesn't mean it's a bad thing. Sure, we needed Christopher Nolan to rescue us from the excesses of Batman and Robin, but not everything needs to be dark, grounded, or serious.

We all know someone that would be at home in Polyester, or have bosses that make us wonder if Office Space was about us, or have an uncle that would fit right in on Strangers with Candy. Camp celebrates the ridiculous. It reminds us that not only can society be silly but that sometimes the only way to deal with that silliness is to laugh at it. And let's face it: camp's back. Glee is must see TV. Filmmakers like Edgar Wright or Miranda July show that you can marry big ideas with a dose of camp and make work that both smart and, well, a little silly.

So, yes, like the 80s, this movie is campy. But you know what? It's ok. Because humor is often the best way to get people to think, and if you want people to laugh about something as serious as where the universe came from, then a little absurdity goes a long way.

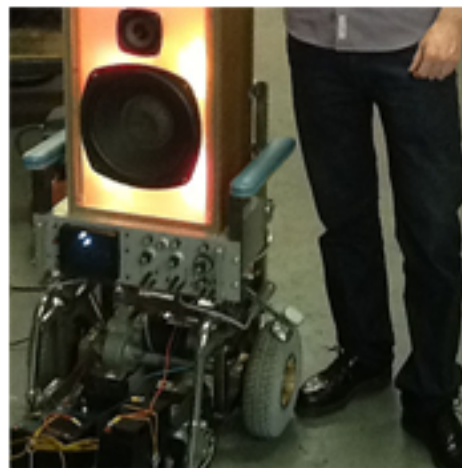
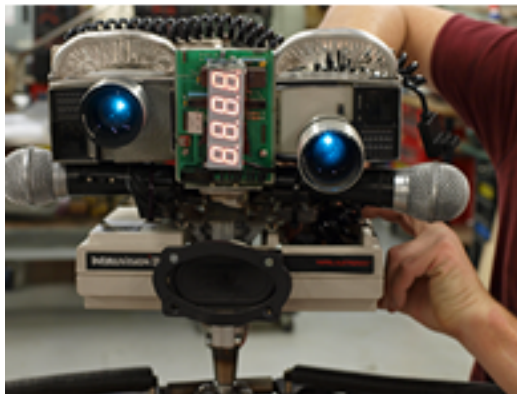




THE CHARACTERS: Ricky

Ricky never fit in with the other robots. When the tumultuous Robot Wars began in the late 24th century, he refused to fight, leading many of his friends to call him a sissy. Ricky always felt , called to a higher purpose, though, and once he began having visions, he knew he must be a prophet. Desperate to find a way to stop the fighting, Ricky distills himself into pure electricity and travels backward in time to find the robot god.

Director's note: Ricky, throughout most of the movie, consists of a homemade robot built by Lester in his garage. He is currently under construction (pictures below) by the talented folks at Custom Movie Props and is being assembled from an array of spare parts - a true DIY hero. On a practical level, his body and head are motorized with puppetry to control the arms. Like Johnny 5, most of his character will be expressed through his eyes and voice.





The Characters: Queen Bee

Beatrice, better known by her CB moniker Queen Bee, is a former disco dancer and big rig trucker who lived a life of party glamour in the 1970's as she crisscrossed the country with her husband Lester. Now in her thirties, she is attempting to settle in to a suburban life but finds herself increasingly restless. She's totally out of place in this homogenous subdivision and is routinely harrassed by her nosy neighbor Penny. The surprise appearance of Ricky gives Queen Bee hope that maybe there is more to life than the hand that she's been dealt.





The Characters: Penny

Penny is a classic 80's villain: the mean stepmom, the busybody, the nosy neighbor. In fact, she's practically begging for some comeuppance. But like many comic villains, Penny is not so much evil as she is unhappy: she grew up in a loveless household, after all, and never felt like she could live up to her mother's dreams. Embittered by years of indifference from her father and the scorn of a mother, Penny has developed a hard outer shell that is rarely penetrated. She takes out her unhappiness on everyone around her, in particular focusing scorn on the succession of foster children she uses as unpaid house labor.

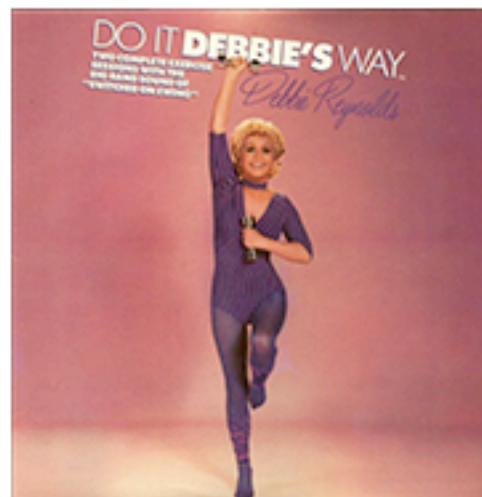




The Characters: Gert

Some people might call Gert mean but she's not: she's just disappointed. Disappointed in a life that wasn't what she wanted, in a daughter that can't get anything quite right, and in a husband who is a shell of a man and can't satisfy her well, um... needs. Because Gert is a woman with definite needs, and she's not ashamed to admit it.

Gert just knew she was destined for greatness when she won the Miss Monroe County pageant at the age of seventeen. Unfortunately for her, too much celebratory wine and twenty minutes in the back of a Chevy led to her pregnancy with Penny and a marriage to Tom, a man who forty years later feigns senility in order to avoid even talking to her. Gert has her looks, though, which she hopes will one day deliver her into the arms of a stronger, wealthier, more virile man, and a daily aerobics workout is Gert's insurance policy to make sure she's ready whenever that man arrives.





The Characters: Lester

Life hasn't always been easy for Lester but he's never been one to let it get him down. After all, he worked his way through school, bought his own truck rig, and even landed the finest woman in Memphis when he married Queen Bee.

Ever since the accident though, he's been struggling with something he never faced before: self-doubt. Being in a wheelchair is hard on a man. Especially a man like Lester who's used to being the big dog in the pack. And when Ricky comes and he sees how happy Queen Bee is to have a new friend, it plays on every insecurity Lester has.





The Characters: Ben

Ben is the son of Korean immigrants, but was orphaned at a young age and has spent most of his life in foster care. Early on, Ben turned to arcade games to help him cope, and has managed to become an expert on early PC's and gaming systems. Ben longs for a permanent home but also figures it will never happen. Despite being American, Ben is often treated as an Asian stereotype and it bothers him.



The Music

In the early 80's, the music industry was full of chatter about the oncoming electrical wave. While the death of the guitar was indeed exaggerated, there's no denying that electronic rhythms and melodies began to play a role in music like never before. Long before Axel F and Daft Punk, bands like Kraftwerk, Hot Butter and even disco maven Donna Summer made intriguing and challenging music completely electronically. Their work will serve as the backdrop for the film, a musical foreshadowing of the coming digital age, with both original music from the era and electronic-inspired score punctuating key moments.



The Color Palette

Just as it promised to revolutionize music, technology infused 80's fashion as well. Wild electronic color palettes gave us neon clothes, laser light shows, and the overwhelming visual stimulation of early music videos.

Gods and Robots will draw from the 80's color palette to create a rich and saturated environment both in sets and wardrobe. Sunglasses, album covers, airbrushed truck rigs, and of course clothes will all burst with wild flashes of electronically inspired color. And since paint and vintage clothes are both cheap, a little of both can make for a stunning visual display even on a micro-budget.





The Director

Stephen Stanley began making films in 2001, debuting with the no-budget comedy *Slick Lily vs the Grand Canyon*. Shot on a camcorder for \$2300, it played multiple festivals and became a cult classic in his hometown of Memphis before being named by *The Commercial Appeal* as an Honorable Mention for "Best Films of 2001". Stephen continued making movies, including the 2004 feature *Six Days in the Life of Mims*, and then pursued MFA film studies at Savannah College of Art and Design. There, he shot several short films including his award-winning thesis film *Push*, which is the story of normal day in a toy store that slowly morphs into an 80's-style music video for Salt N Pepa's "Push It".

After relocating to Los Angeles, Stephen worked in the Film Finance and Distribution division of The Gersh Agency, where he got first hand experience structuring and selling a wide range of indie films. He currently runs feature acquisitions for an independent film distribution company. In addition to *Gods and Robots*, Stephen's projects in development include *Marijuana Man*, which he wrote for Tuff Gong Worldwide. A graphic novel based on his script was released by Image Comics in 2011. His most recent short, *Jehovah's Badass*, premiered at the 2012 LA Short Film Festival with additional fest screenings on tap.

