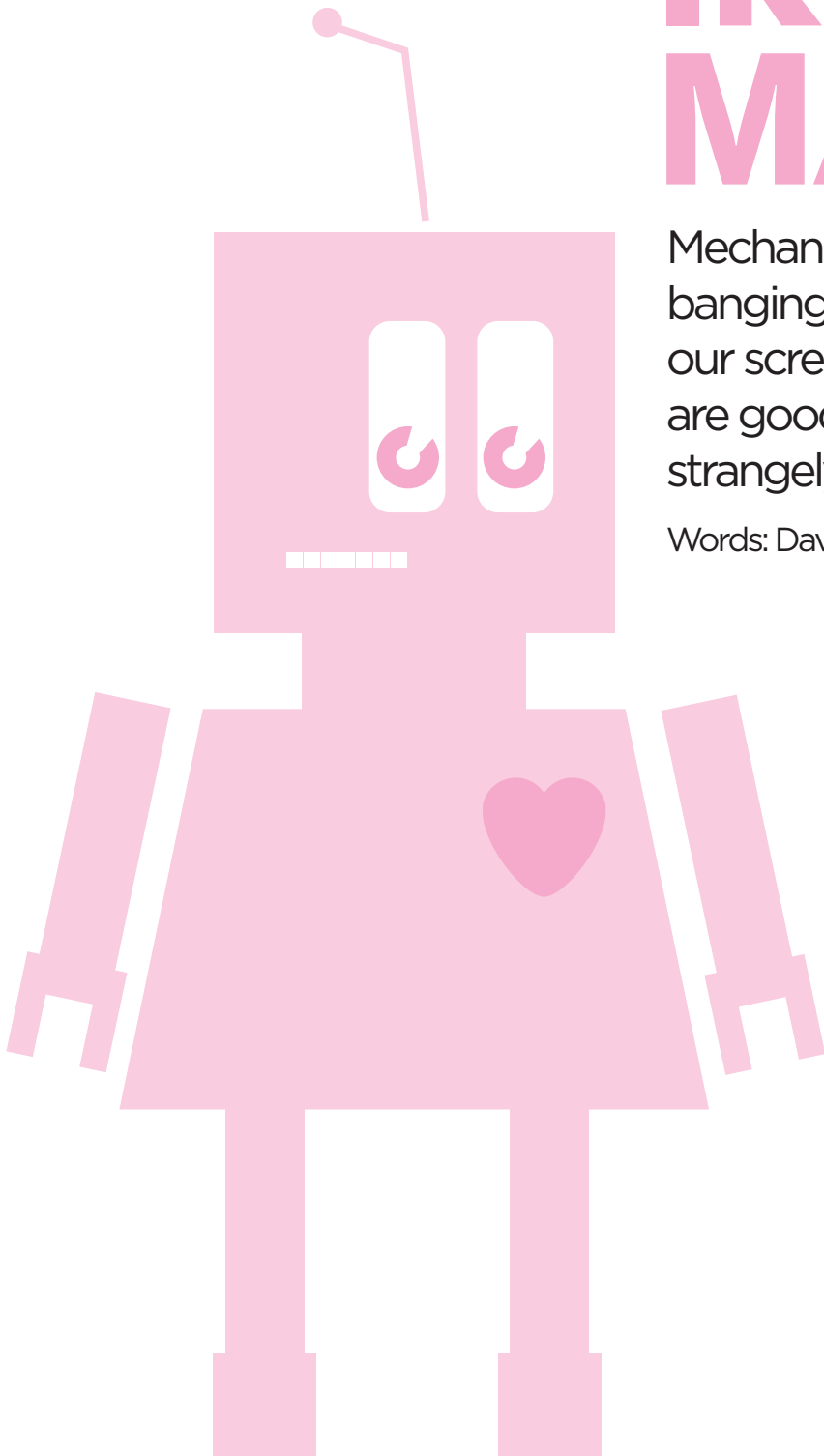


IRON MAIDENS

Mechanical mademoiselles have been banging and clanging their way onto our screens for over 80 years. Some are good, some are evil. But most, strangely, aren't bad looking.

Words: David H. Szondy



Pygmalion had his Galatea, Frankenstein had his bride and since Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* in 1926, men have had a bevy of buxom robotic babes that have cut a wide swatch through the popular imagination, whether they are called androids, gynoids, or fembots.

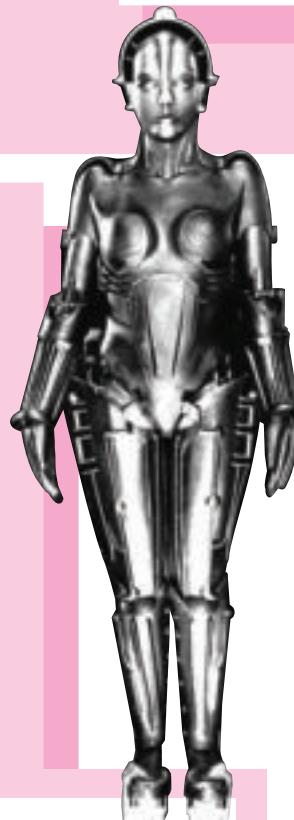
But there's a double standard at work when it comes to robots. Generally, if robots are male or sexless, they are metallic creatures that are all industrial-strength joints and claws. However, if they are fembots, then they are (at the very least) perfect imitations of the human form. It's been this way ever since Homer described in the *Iliad* how the Greek god Hephaestus (no fool he) made a pair of golden maidens to help him around the shop. I'm not complaining, mind you; just making an observation.

Fembots have always been rarer than the common or garden variety mechanical man, but what they lack in numbers they make up for in quality. Fembots require fine design detail, elaborate cosmetic engineering, fine motor control, a more elegant superstructure and an elusive quality that engineers refer to technically as BAAARRROOOMMMPH.

With the exception of Lester Del Ray's classic story *Helen O'Loy* (1938), depictions of fembots were relatively scarce up until the 1950s when they started to show up as a stock subject on the cover of the more lurid pulp science fiction magazines. This was because with the changes in post-war American society the notion of a mechanical female could be used as a metaphor for our inchoate insecurities over the relationship between the sexes. Or maybe it was because the magazines' core audience was made up of 14 year-old boys who couldn't get a date because they spent all their time reading science fiction.

From the 1960s onwards, fembots were showing up in films, television and comic books with some regularity. In 1969, Bulldog Drummond faced fembot assassins in the film *Deadlier than the Male*. In 1975, fembots were the feminist's worst nightmare scenario in the *Stepford Wives*. Whether it was the politics or the satellite dish-sized sun hats the fembots sported that were more disturbing remains open to debate. In addition, there were menacing fembots from outer space in *Space: 1999* (1974), Julie Newmar's turn as *My Living Doll* in 1964, fembot saloon girls in *Westworld* (1973), an out of control Killbot in *Eve of Destruction* (1991) and even fembot underground resistance leaders in *Alien Resurrection* (1997). And let us not leave out Kelly Le Brock from *Weird Science* (1985), who was unique as the only fembot to have omnipotence as a design feature.

With such an abundance of choices, narrowing down the Top Ten fembots is tricky, but here's our try – in chronological order, as we've no desire to offend a lady with a built-in plasma rifle.



1. Maria

From the silent sci-fi classic, *Metropolis* (1926). 'Maria' (seen here in her pre-makeover state) sets the gold standard for all other fembots. Built by the mad scientist Rotwang and then altered to resemble a rebel leader who was also called Maria. Confusing, but there you are. Unfortunately, rather than calming down the local political situation, the robot Maria took to alternating between doing nude erotic dances for the gentry that resulted in the odd murder here and there and urging on the workers to full blown riots in a rather excitable manner. As to why Rotwang had a fembot hanging around the laboratory, it seems that his girlfriend dumped him for another man years ago and Rotwang decided to indulge in a DIY project to replace her. Ten out of ten for ambition, but minus several hundred for creepiness.

2. Andrea

From the *Star Trek* episode 'What Little Girls are Made Of' (1966). Andrea was the product of an android manufacturing process that believed in giving value for money. We've left out the blouses and passed on the savings to YOU! Despite being a hench-fembot to a power-crazed mad scientist bent on galactic domination, Andrea had the good sense to switch sides and help Captain Kirk defeat the nefarious plan. This may have been out of a burgeoning sense of humanity, but more likely because Kirk was a better kisser than her old boss.



3. No. 11

From the unbearably cheesy *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1966). No. 11 was part of the eponymous Dr. Goldfoot's army of female robots with which he planned to rule the world. Exactly how this was supposed to work is open to question as this plan involved No. 11 walking about town in her raincoat while flashing her gold lame bikini and doing unmentionables to Dwayne Hickman. Whatever his talents as a fembot designer, it is clear that Dr. Goldfoot hadn't really been thought things through very well. The sequel, *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* made *Bikini Machine* look like *Citizen Kane*.

4. Fembots

From *The Bionic Woman* episodes 'Kill Oscar' and (wait for it) 'Fembots in Las Vegas.' The latter title should be grounds for prosecution. On the other hand, they did put the 'fem' in fembot, so it all evens out. Creations of yet another mad scientist bent on world domination, the fembots were beautiful, ruthless, deadly and the arch enemies of the Bionic Woman. Unfortunately, their faces tended to fall off at the most awkward of moments, proving that it really is the little details that count. Would a clasp or even just a little screw have been too much to ask for?



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6. Seven of Nine

From *Star Trek Voyager* (1995). Originally human before assimilation by The Borg, Seven of Nine, Tertiary Adjunct of Unimatrix Zero-One – to use her full name – has cybernetic implants which improve her visual acuity, reactions, strength and intelligence. We know that this technically makes her a cyborg rather than a true fembot, but given her exceptional... talents and bringing the corset into the 24th century, a point can be stretched.

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5. Pris

From *Blade Runner* (1982). Pris was a 'standard pleasure model' notable for extremely violent acrobatics, unique tastes in make up, and serving up hard boiled eggs straight from the pan with her bare hands.

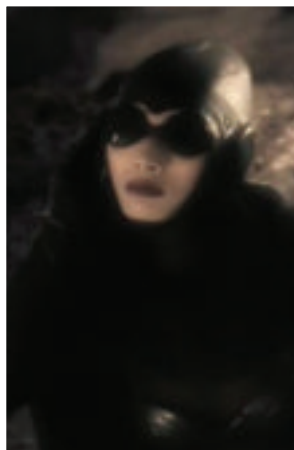


7. Fembots Mark II

From *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997). An improvement on the deadly model seen in *The Bionic Woman*, although their dress sense seems to have regressed 10 years and hair looks like it hadn't been seen since Nancy Sinatra's boots stopped walking. Their faces do stay on, which is a dramatic upgrade, and their rather unique way of packing armament is rather impressive in an unnerving sort of way. It is a shame about the whole exploding head thing though.

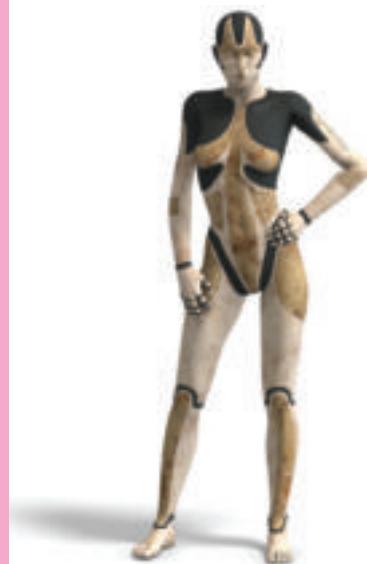
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8. Mysterious Woman

From *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004). The Mysterious Woman is otherwise nameless and a fembot of few, okay, no, words. Built by the reclusive megalomaniac Dr Totenkopf (which literally means 'death's head' in German), The Mysterious Woman was designed to be his personal assistant, travelling companion, 'recruiter' of reluctant scientists who fail to understand that 'no' is not an acceptable answer, and ruthless ninja assassin as called upon. Fashion preferences tended toward hoods, capes and earth tones. The real mystery of this rather silent and emotion-free lady is what the heck does a fembot need with goggles?



How to Spot a Fembot

Scientists say that within twenty years we'll be dating robots. Seeing as fembots are the original high-maintenance date, you might want to make sure that the woman you're asking out to dinner is not running on plutonium batteries. Here are a few helpful hints to spot the more cybernetically inclined.

- Does she her dress sense run to long gowns with with disturbing décolletage and alarmingly large sun hats? Cat suits? Hot pants? Seventies pants suits?
- Does she literally put her face on in the morning?
- Worse, when overstimulated, does her head tend to spin around and explode?
- Despite being slim and shapely, does she weigh in at a quarter of a ton?
- Are her views on operating systems unusually heated?
- Is her behaviour a bit... extreme? Is she very submissive and eager to please with a vacuous smile that never changes? Or does she hurl tanks around with one hand?
- Does smoke come out of her 'jumblies'?
- Is she extremely inquisitive as to the whereabouts of Sarah Connor?
- Does she demand that all your dating destinations have wi-fi even though she doesn't own a laptop?



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9. T-X

From *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003). T-X was developed after the original Terminator model was elected governor of California and therefore became a bit too high profile for field work. A shape-shifting prototype with an array of futuristic weaponry, she kills anything that moves. And also kills anything that doesn't move. Heck, she just kills anything on general principle. T-X does not like complication. She's definitely NOT a Stepford Wife.

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10. No 6

From *Battlestar Galactica* (2006). A replicant built by the Cylon machine race to infiltrate human society. Stunningly beautiful, with an incredible figure, and always provocatively dressed, No. 6 was about as inconspicuous as a thousand watt bulb in a phone box. It's a lucky thing that the Cylons didn't bother to give her name. With their track record she'd have probably ended up being called 'Ford Prefect'. Aside from the exceptional coachwork, No. 6 was also notable for being able to manifest herself as an interactive hallucination inside a man's head, although by wearing that sort of clobber, she was probably there already.

