

## Q&A: 'Interstellar' filmmaker Nolan on his robots

October 31 2014, by Derrik J. Lang

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-In this Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2014 file photo, actor Matthew McConaughey poses for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the film "Interstellar," in central London. In the sci-fi extravaganza out Nov. 5, 2014, a particularly acerbic robot named TARS (portrayed by Bill Irwin) accompanies a team of astronauts led by McConaughey's pilot Cooper to find humankind a new home after an ecological disaster wrecks earth. "If anything, he's the one Cooper gets along with the most out of anyone up there," said McConaughey. (Photo by Joel Ryan/Invision/AP, File)

In his secrecy-shrouded sci-fi extravaganza "Interstellar," filmmaker Christopher Nolan isn't just taking audiences to outer space. He's also sending a couple of robots along for the ride—and they're just not on board to sweep the floors.

"The idea was that they'd been designed to put humans at ease during extended periods of time," said "Interstellar" screenwriter Jonathan Nolan. "They were originally conceived as Marines and programmed to engender the kind of comradery that a Marine would, so they've been programmed with a sense of humor and variable levels of honesty."

The sleek grey 'bots, which can be briefly glimpsed in the movie's trailers, are walking-and-talking rectangular slabs of shiny metal that operate like a cross between a Swiss army knife and an iPhone. Their blocky fragments can disconnect and rotate to perform a variety of actions, from pushing buttons to cartwheeling across alien planets. (Paramount declined to provide images of the characters for this story.)

In "Interstellar," out next Wednesday, a particularly acerbic robot named TARS (portrayed by Bill Irwin) accompanies a team of astronauts led by Matthew McConaughey's pilot Cooper to find humankind a new home after an ecological disaster wrecks Earth.

"If anything, he's the one Cooper gets along with the most out of anyone up there," said McConaughey.

In an interview with The Associated Press, "Interstellar" writer-director Christopher Nolan discussed his vision of the robots, their artificial intelligence and importance to the film's story:

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AP: You have robots in this movie. What did you hope to achieve with

those characters?



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Nolan: I wanted a more realistic approach to what a robot would be. I didn't even call them robots in the script. I referred to them as "articulated machines" because I wanted my crew and everybody to stop thinking of your standard idea of a robot. I wanted to have a machine in

the film that was like a piece of gear—very tough, very resilient—that had been designed for whatever purpose best suited it.

AP: How did you approach the design of TARS? He's different from other robots we've seen in film.

Nolan: As we pushed the concept further, it became a very minimalist appearance that disguises very complex functionality. My idea was to remove any trace of anthropomorphism, so it doesn't have a face. It doesn't have arms and legs. It does have a voice, and therefore a personality. The great Bill Irwin, who was puppeteering and voicing TARS, was able to give an inanimate, non-human object a personality.

AP: For their shape, were you inspired by the monolith from "2001: A Space Odyssey"?

Nolan: I think, in its science fiction context, inevitably your mind goes to that—and that's fine by me. Definitely, the spirit of "2001" hangs over the film. It was one of our aspirations to pay homage to that film. It also relates strongly to the architecture of Mies van der Rohe. As we honed in on the idea, I asked my designer (Nathan Crowley), who's a very big fan of modern architecture: What if we designed a robot as if Mies van der Rohe designed a robot? I think he really nailed it.

AP: The robots actually help drive the story forward. How important was that to you?



This photo released by Paramount Pictures shows, Matthew McConaughey, in a scene from the film, "Interstellar," from Paramount Pictures and Warner Brothers Pictures, in association with Legendary Pictures. (AP Photo/Paramount Pictures, Melinda Sue Gordon)

Nolan: In my brother's draft, he was really into robots and [artificial intelligence](#). What I wound up focusing on was the issue of why you need human beings on this mission. The robots are presented as being physically superior to humans and able to lift heavier things and follow orders perfectly. We kept coming back to the idea of intuition, human adaptability and innovation. That's driven by a survival instinct, which a [robot](#) can't have. That makes the robots very important in the story. They take on their own incredible personalities, but they're not human. They keep you thinking about what it means to be human.

**More information:** [interstellar.withgoogle.com](http://interstellar.withgoogle.com)

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Citation: Q&A: 'Interstellar' filmmaker Nolan on his robots (2014, October 31) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-qa-interstellar-filmmaker-nolan-robots.html>

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