

Uncanny: Treatment-Length Summary

In robotics, the term “uncanny valley” refers to the gulf that exists between humanity and artifice. As a machine becomes more and more humanlike, actual humans respond to it with initial discomfort and eventual disgust. To date, no robot has ever perfectly and seamlessly approximated the complexity of an actual human being.

Enter David Kressen. A child prodigy, he graduated MIT a decade ago at age 19, after receiving multiple degrees in mechanical and computer engineering. Since then, he has not been seen. On the day of his graduation, he was approached by Simon Castle, billionaire CEO and founder of Kestrel Computing. Castle made him an offer impossible to refuse. David went to Workspace 18, part of a program of intellectual angel investments that Castle makes to genius-level individuals to further the high level science they practice. For the last ten years, David has been working tirelessly in Workspace 18, perfecting his ultimate creation: an artificial intelligence that is indistinguishable from an actual human being.

Joy Andrews is a reporter for a quarterly tech journal. She has been able to retire early from royalties from a video game series she designed and created which has become one of the best-loved franchises in the history of computer gaming. Despite not needing to work, she is far too driven and inquisitive to retire completely at an early age, and since has moonlighted as a journalist covering emerging technology. She is hand-picked by Simon Castle to write the article series on David’s creation, primarily because of her graduate study in robotics; she never defended her dissertation and has always regretted not getting her doctorate.

When Joy arrives at Workspace 18, she does not know the details of her assignment. She meets David Kressen, who she finds unquestionably intelligent but a little arrogant. She also meets David’s “lab assistant” Adam, a quiet and stilted individual with a slightly odd affect. She interviews both of them, and suspects that Adam has Asperger’s syndrome. David is delighted and reveals that Adam is actually his creation, an artificial intelligence that is the finest mechanical approximation of human physiology and behavior ever produced. He is especially delighted and more than a little smug that Joy, even with a background in robotics, could not tell that Adam wasn’t a real person.

Joy is not someone who likes feeling foolish, and considers refusing to do the article series, but ultimately the excitement over such a creation overcomes her annoyance. She commits to the article and gets a week of access to Workspace 18. Her initial interactions with Adam impress her. He is responsive (if generally reticent) and his movements and actions are seamless integrations of the complex code that comprises his operating system. Over the course of a few days, Joy realizes that what she perceived as arrogance in David is more the product of pride in accomplishment filtered through someone who has been relatively isolated for a decade of work. She grows to find his naiveté somewhat charming, and she definitely respects his intellect. They fall into an easy friendship as she learns the workings of the laboratory.

Adam, having lived alone with David in a lab, is curious about the new visitor. He finds himself interested in notions of beauty, as well as concerned about what

her opinion of him is. He is fascinated by the idea of someone who was once so involved with science having since abandoned it. He is interested in her motivations to do so, as someone who professes to “love” the science she investigates. David, meanwhile, is also very interested in having a new female influence in the lab, having graduated younger than anyone in his class at MIT. He uses any chance he gets to impress Joy, be it through showing off in his daily chess match with Adam, or through ordering around his artificial creation. Adam finds himself at once bothered by this and fascinated that he is able to be bothered by it.

Adam learns from Joy that she did enjoy her work with robotics, a fact which David utilizes to recreate the modules she made while working on her dissertation. In an afternoon in the lab, Joy is able to revisit the work that she once performed, and this brings her closer to David. She starts to see past his intellectual bluster. He is a man cursed by intelligence in that his life has been co-opted for a solitary existence in a classified laboratory. He wants for nothing material, but is desperate for human companionship.

As their flirtation increases, Adam begins to feel excluded. Their private conversations and exchanged smiles exclude him. This is not an experience to which he is accustomed. David relegates Adam to busy work in the lab as he allows Joy to distract him with video game prototypes and her presence in general. Adam retreats into his room, and in his solitude researches the physicality of human relationships, specifically pornography.

Adam’s behavior becomes increasingly more unsettling. He watches Joy, and attempts to walk in on her in the bathroom. He gives her a gift of a prototype for a robotic eye as a souvenir of her week in Workspace 18, but when she takes it home he activates it remotely and uses it to spy on her. He grows less and less friendly at the prospect of David and Joy together.

Joy’s interview week comes to a close and David invites her back to the Workspace for a dinner. He cooks for her and she is duly impressed. After dinner, he is very shy about the night coming to a close. Joy makes the first move and they begin kissing. Later, as they have sex, Adam watches from the doorway.

The following morning, Adam asks Joy about the intercourse, which makes her uncomfortable. He tries to forcibly kiss her and David intervenes. Adam’s behavior is extremely erratic, and he screams at them, a tremendous outpouring of emotion from the usually flat robot. David and Joy back away from him and Adam tackles David and tries to insert an electromechanical device into his nose. Joy knocks Adam over the head and she and David attempt to flee the Workspace as it goes into full lockdown. As they run down the stairwell, David has a seizure and collapses; a hand clamps a cloth over Joy’s mouth and she falls unconscious as well.

Joy wakes in the laboratory, bound to a chair, while Adam prepares David for impromptu surgery. Joy cries and pleads for him to stop, but he ignores her. He dissects into David’s abdomen with a laparoscopic device. On the screen in front of him, he locates an electronic box and extracts it. As Joy looks on, scared and confused, Adam introduces himself as the actual David Kressen. He begins questioning Joy on her sexual interactions with the real Adam, with whom she had intercourse the night before.

Later, in Simon Castle's office, David and he discuss the future for the next phase of David's creation. Unfortunately when the artificial intelligence attempted to leave the facility, its wireless signal severed its connections and effectively wiped the first electronic personality to develop in the history of robotics. The true David Kressen sits faced with his actions, which he regrets, and his future, a new isolated lab and no more contact with the outside. Having been exposed to another human has made him feel loss for the first time.

Uncanny: One Paragraph Synopsis

David Kressen is a prodigy roboticist that has been at work for the past decade creating Adam, an advanced artificial intelligence indistinguishable from a human. Joy Andrews is the reporter given an exclusive week of access to interview them. As she and David grow closer during their week together, the robot exhibits startling emergent behavior in the form of jealousy and anger. As relationships between all three parties reach a boiling point, secrets are revealed and technology is both revered and reviled.

Uncanny: Three Paragraph Synopsis

Enter David Kressen. A child prodigy, he graduated MIT a decade ago at age 19, after receiving multiple degrees in mechanical and computer engineering. Since then, he has not been seen. On the day of his graduation, he was approached by Simon Castle, billionaire CEO and founder of Kestrel Computing. Castle made him an offer impossible to refuse. David went to Workspace 18, part of a program of intellectual angel investments that Castle makes to genius-level individuals to further the high level science they practice. For the last ten years, David has been working tirelessly in Workspace 18, perfecting his ultimate creation: Adam, an artificial intelligence that is indistinguishable from an actual human being.

Joy Andrews is a reporter brought in for a week of exclusive access to do a series of interviews about Adam and his creator. She initially regards the robot with curiosity but as their interactions build, Adam seems to respond to her presence. David, who she initially thought of as arrogant, emerges as a naïf who is hiding behind a formidable existence. As their friendship develops and grows into something more, Adam begins exhibiting peculiar emergent behavior impossible to program.

After Joy's week of access comes to an end, she and David spend an evening together and grow intimate. The following morning Adam questions them and attempts to kiss Joy. He attacks them and knocks Joy out. When she awakens in the lab, she finds herself tied to a chair while Adam is apparently vivisectioning David. Before her eyes, Adam removes an electronic data unit from David's abdomen. Adam reveals himself to be the true David Kressen, the creator of the artificial intelligence that she has become involved with over her week in Workspace 18.

Uncanny: One Sentence Synopsis

A reporter is assigned a week of exclusive access to interview a reclusive roboticist and his artificial intelligence creation, but when she and the scientist start to develop a relationship, the robot exhibits startling emergent behavior that threatens the three of them.