

Frederik Norgaard about MY ROBOT BROTHER

“I wanted people to feel welcome in a warm future”

School life sucks for 12 year old Alberte with her old android Robbi being such an embarrassment to her. Here comes the perfect birthday present – the newest model of humanoids! New robot Konrad looks and acts completely as if he were human and suddenly Alberte’s popularity spikes as she is now the kid with the most advanced technology at school. But can the connection between Alberte and Konrad hold up to a real friendship? Director Frederik Norgaard: *“It’s a sci-fi about people and technology, and what happens when we choose technology over real life relationships.”*

For which specific tasks in life would you consider it practical to have a robot at your service?

Frederik Norgaard: I wouldn’t say no to a lawnmower robot, one for cleaning, tidying up or shopping groceries. A robot caddie for playing golf would be nice!

The future depicted in your film is not exactly dystopian; it’s optimistic and colourful, with just a few glitch-

es in the pattern.

Norgaard: I obviously didn’t want to make another dystopian sci-fi film about the future; there’s plenty of them already. Children and adults need hope; I created a future that was positive, hopeful and green, in which all problems regarding global warming are solved.

How were they solved?

Norgaard: The key element is recycling, refurbishing and not using more than what we need. We print the food that we eat, we don’t overproduce, we refurbish our cars. Each household grows its own food, generates its own power and classic cars have been changed into electric ones.

But people’s status - just like nowadays with mobile phones - is still defined by fashionable technology.

Norgaard: I wanted to make a film about the future with a topic that was relevant today for the audience to identify with the story and the characters, like every good sci-fi film. I see with my own kids how whoever



is holding the newest technology, is considered more interesting and cool. However we shouldn’t define ourselves by the technology that we hold but by the relationships that we have.

The main character of your film is a robot...

Norgaard: In the universe that we created, everyone has its own robot; like having an iPhone or like talking to Siri. Robots are everywhere and every kid at school has one personal assistant robot following him around. That’s

where Konrad comes in. He is the newest, coolest model on the market, which makes Alberte extremely popular among friends.

One of the key scenes in the film is the arrival of Konrad, an almost magical moment.

Norgaard: If that scene didn’t work, the audience wouldn’t believe the premise of the film. We wrote it according to the procedure of configuring an iPhone, or installing Siri. *“Hello Siri, my name is...”* There is a scene in



which kids ask their robots about the meaning of life. That is another reference to today's technology. If you'd ask your iPhone, the manufacturers have programmed a response.

Even when immersing us in the future, there is a lot of nostalgia to your story, impersonated by Robbi the old teddy bear robot. Everybody has warm feelings for him.

Norgaard: Technology is not all bad; there are good and bad sides to it. It's all about how we humans use this technology. Robbi is actually good technology. Our goal was to create a clash of different periods - 70s, 80s, 90s... - Robbi is the result of that. He is a very positive character, friendly to everybody, and the film shows that if you are good to the people you meet, positive things will happen to you. Even more important, Robbi represents Alberte's innocence and purity. Caught between childhood and adulthood, she is going through a difficult, insecure period in life.

I suppose Konrad's design was well-over thought. Why does he look the way he does?

Norgaard: As the scenes between Konrad and Alberte often express poetic and complex emotions, three things were important about Konrad's



design: 1. That he was more cool and futuristic than Robbi. 2. That his looks would convince the audience that he actually is a robot, not an actor. 3. That he'd fit the pod he arrives in.

On the other hand Robbi's design is utterly charming.

Norgaard: Robbi was one of our main challenges. I knew that the best way to make it work was by putting a man in that suit, without getting people to think "oh, there's a man in a funny suit". It was important that the kids on set had somebody to talk to, instead of doing it all in CGI. We decided to keep the costume super basic. When the designer sent me the first clip of

the actor walking in it... kaboom! It worked. Everybody loved Robbi. Except the actor inside the costume - he felt super lonesome and extremely hot. Kudos to him!

How did you pick your locations, or how did you make them look extra futuristic?

Norgaard: For a sci-fi film, MY ROBOT BROTHER had a very limited budget, so we had to be very precise with our locations. We were so lucky; there wasn't much upgrading to be done. The only set we constructed was the interior of Alberte's house; we needed a greenhouse on the roof.

Your hope for the future speaks through the film's colour design.

Norgaard: As the future had to look bright and positive, we used mainly earthly colours and organic materials, except for the factory scenes in the end. I wanted people to feel welcome in a warm future.

One thing is clear: even with the most developed technology, adults will always remain clumsy and far from perfect.

Norgaard: The film is seen from Alberte's point of view and all children between the age of 11 and 18 consider their parents super awkward. Moreover, the parents in the film are actually the children of today. Their online lives are the result of children today spending too much time online - a meta reference towards the future.

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Gert Hermans