



Human Sister

Jim Bainbridge

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The ancient moralities and worldviews of established religions and the ruling majorities of Earth's most powerful nation-states have been fighting a rearguard action against the encroachment of science on what they consider to be the core of the human self: its mind and consciousness. The United Nations Human Genome Protection Act has outlawed all genetic enhancements of human offspring, and the old contenders for world domination, the United States and China, have allied themselves to destroy all conscious nonhuman operating units in every outpost of civilization. Set in such a world, Human Sister is the story of a prodigy, Sara Jensen, the granddaughter of Professor Severn Jensen, one of the world's leading experts on conscious artificial intelligences, who, with his wife, raises and homeschools Sara on their beautiful California vineyard. Sara's family also includes a secret fourth member-her illegal bioroid brother, Michael, whom she helps raise and who was made by her grandfather in part from Sara's neurons and other cells and who is capable of accessing her thoughts and affections. Amidst a dangerous and darkening outer world, Sara discovers that she also must contend with the secrets and deceptions of those she loves-her grandfather, her boyfriend, and Michael-and she learns that even the best of intentions diligently pursued often have unintended, and tragic, consequences.

Human Sister Details

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Author : Jim Bainbridge

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Kiersi says

Let me just put it this way: *Human Sister* is challenging. It is challenging in its ideas, in its themes, and in its style. The payoff, however, is huge, and makes Bainbridge's long discussions of neuroscience and warfare and ethics worthwhile.

Sara is not the child her parents wanted. As some of the world's leading android scientists, they spend their time developing and understanding androids, not human children; Sara is instead raised and schooled by her grandfather, the man responsible for conceiving the first android. But life in her grandfather's bubble becomes lonely, so Sara's parents create an android named First Brother. But young Sara is disturbed by First Brother's emotional distance and insensitivity, and cannot bond with him.

Soon the androids come under political attack: the American religious right decries them as unnatural, as monstrosities, and they are criminalized. After Sara's parents and their android children flee to Canada, Sara's grandfather begins a new, top-secret project: Michael, an android who is part organic and part Sentiren, who will learn and grow from mental infancy to adulthood much as a human would. And Sara is tasked with raising him--of being his mother, his sister, and best friend, a monumental task to manage alongside her burgeoning attraction to her cousin Elio.

There are so many twists and curves and nuances in Bainbridge's *Human Sister* that it's quite impossible to capture it--even simply to capture its *premise*--in a few sentences. Sara's narrative is framed as a reflection, a manuscript she is writing down while mysteriously sequestered in an underwater haven with Michael. This framework taints every forward step of Sara's life with questions. I love this style of narration (when done right), as it allows dark foreshadowing and follows her story with a sense of impending doom.

I wouldn't call the romance in *Human Sister* "fiery" or "explosive" or any of those other words one uses to describe YA books. The relationship between Sara and Elio simply emerges, naturally, and progresses in a fashion that makes the reader twinge with expectancy and sigh at the results. It meanders along just as everything else in this novel does--teasing, twisting, revealing more and more of itself like a woman peeling off layers of clothing, holding back the big cards until the end. Bainbridge's craft is masterful: the plot, while never catapulting forward like it would in an action novel, is still gripping. The prose, while sometimes overly flowery (I say this literally, as Bainbridge's most drawn-out descriptions are about flowers and plants) is obviously crafted with care. The depth of Bainbridge's inquiry--what it means to be human, and the moral dilemmas that accompany artificial intelligence--lies at the heart of everything in *Human Sister*.

I'm giving *Human Sister* five hearts mainly because *it should be read*. Though the story's forward momentum stumbles from time to time-- characters have a habit of revealing feelings or describing events in page after page of back-and-forth dialogue--I found I didn't mind these interludes as I read along. It feels as if it has been placed correctly in this novel; if long philosophical discussions between two immensely smart people were going to happen, this is the story where it would. Better yet, Bainbridge couches the difficult topics of sex, puberty, and love in the easily recognizable format of a coming-of-age tale.

I don't want to spoil it for you, but this novel will leave you feeling like you just watched a European indie flick. Sad, but pondering; fulfilled, and yet wondering about the future.

Julianna says

A very thought provoking novel that discusses human emotions and their impact. While some of the techno speak was above my head and i tended to skim through those sections the story was actually pretty amazing. I was brought to tears in the end and had to re-read the end just to experience it all again. Highly recommended!

VampireNovelFan says

Not what I was expecting

I was hoping for a bit more than I got with this book. The perspective primarily focuses on Sara Jensen, a young teen girl who has lived a sheltered life, becoming an experiment of her grandfather as she is used to create an android. Though the world has been populated with thousands of these beings, this new android, Michael, grows and develops by being directly tied to her experiences. This helps humanize their kind a little more. However, the government wants to outlaw these practices and eliminate the world of all androids, believing that they pose a threat to the human race. So her family must keep the existence of their beloved Michael and their other androids a secret, going to amazing lengths to do so. But will their efforts be in vain?

To be quite honest, the beginning had a lot of promise, but it slows down for me immensely for the majority of the book. This book is classified as science fiction and that's honestly all you get. The themes are thought provoking, but not to surprising. There is not a lot of plot progression, just pages and pages of useless detail. While the jargon wasn't totally over my head, it's an extremely cerebral read and you should be prepared for that. It's so cerebral that it comes off as clinical and I honestly felt as if I was reading a text book most of the time. I really wanted more story, conflict, and drama. It gets there eventually, but I was tempted to stop reading for the majority of the book. It didn't really feel like a climax either; it just happened.

This also reminded me at times of the film *Artificial Intelligence* (starring Haley Joel Osmet) with similar themes and an anti-android agenda. But I was genuinely more attached to that story.

I think the book would have been improved if it featured Michael's POV as an android. I think it would have made more of an impact to get into his head and compare it to our own thought processes and emotions as normal humans. I would have enjoyed comparing the nuances that would give away that his kind is not quite right, but still ambitious.

I don't see myself reading this again and I can't really recommend it. It's certainly strange and out there at times, but I'm sure there are other sci-fi books that accomplish this while moving the plot along at a good pace.

Briga says

Some pretty cool concepts regarding AI; enjoyed the book. Wish I could give 3.5.

Tricia Griffith says

It was strange and disturbing, but kind of to be expected when you consider the subject. If you enjoy that kind dystopian, sci-fi, alternate earth type of story, you will probably enjoy it. It is also interesting in that it spends a good deal of time contemplating what is consciousness and deliberating the pros and cons of genetic manipulation and creating artificial life.

Ken Korczak says

Brilliant!

Kathy Cunningham says

Jim Bainbridge's HUMAN SISTER is at once a condemnation of human nature and a celebration of human potential. Amazingly complex, the novel explores what it means to be human against the backdrop of a futuristic America in which artificial intelligence has been outlawed as an affront against God. The central character is sixteen-year-old Sara, who has been raised by her parents and grandparents (scientists committed to the development of sentient artificial life) to revere androids and to protect them at all costs. What frustrates Sara about her android brothers (called only First Brother and Second Brother) is that they lack the capacity for emotion, and they seem disinterested in her as their human sister. When Sara's grandfather embarks on an experiment to create a fully human android, capable of love and compassion, Sara is given a unique opportunity to influence this new life form, to share her thoughts and dreams with him, and to be intimately connected with him from the moment of his "birth." In a way, Sara is Michael's mother, but she is also his very human friend, the one from which he learns to be human himself.

Politically, HUMAN SISTER takes its shots at a wide variety of groups. The religious right, which controls the government at the time the story is set, bases policy on scripture and turns away from science in a reactionary effort to lead by the word of God. The military excels in horrific torture (even of teenage girls), and military leaders are one-dimensionally evil in their non-stop efforts to keep science under control. That said, scientists themselves are equally attacked in this novel. Sara's cold and selfish parents throw their human daughter off on her grandparents so they can spend all their time with their two android sons. And Sara's grandfather, as intelligent and insightful as he is, uses his granddaughter in perverse and incomprehensible ways in his efforts to perfect his own android creation.

Overall, HUMAN SISTER is about human failings. In spite of our great potential, we are selfish creatures, greedy and petty, vengeful and ruthless, with a love of power and an inability to see beyond our own goals. It doesn't matter if we are acting in the name of God, for the love of country, or for the advancement of science, we are fatally flawed. The irony, of course, is that our creations - the androids that come so close to being human by the end of the novel - are equally flawed. In a way, HUMAN SISTER is a metaphor for human existence. If we were indeed created by God, we must ask ourselves what kind of God it was. What were his motives, his inspirations, his dreams for these new creatures that looked like him? And how did it feel when his creations turned against him in order to be free?

HUMAN SISTER is a fascinating story about self-awareness, creativity, and love. I found Sara to be a unique and unsettling narrator, a teenage girl with an android's capability for logic and reason, but with a human capacity for love and sacrifice. I recommend the novel to anyone looking for a challenging and

provocative story. This one will not be soon forgotten.

Laura says

Loved this sci-fi book about a future when humanoids and other "oids" are able to be created with gene technology. The heroine of the book is a girl raised by her grandparents while her parents create humanoid "brothers." Fascinating story. Great characters. I recommend it.

Jo Anne B says

This is such a relevant book. The whole concept of creating robots using human cells and DNA is quite scary because of its unknown impact on our own species' evolution. But I believe it is only a matter of time before this happens. And once it does, there will be no turning back. That is why books like these are important. They remind us of the consequences of our egos.

The science in this book was very current and well done. Jim Bainbridge seemed very knowledgeable on genes and their expression. Everything seemed plausible and believable. The main character Sara's Grandpa worked on robotics and emergent intelligences in his company Magnasea. A lot of its use was for the military and security purposes but some of it was to help with of all things, the house cleaning. The technology was all very expensive so not everyone had all these amenities. Grandpa's house had antoids that came out at night to seek out and carry off dust and crumbs or mutated foreign bodies acting as the immune system for the house. There were also larger antoids that checked to make sure the operating codes in the smaller antoids were correct. His house also had Gatekeepers, or alien microbots, that checked each person for security breeches. Needless to say, in the future, technology that was meant to keep us safe was really paranoia meant to keep others out.

I felt bad for Sara. She was an unplanned pregnancy that her parents wanted to abort but her Grandpa convinced them to let him and her Grandma raise her, basically as a guinea pig to his experiments. Her Grandpa used her as an experiment her whole life and sacrificed her free will in order to create a new type of android, a bioroid, or a human robot with emotions. Sara was to have three of these "brothers". The first had no emotions, she never really knew the second, and the third one she had to raise like her child. There were chapters written by her First Brother that didn't make any sense which was weird. Sara had scenescreens to mimic the outdoors rather than let her be able to go outdoors where she wanted. She wasn't allowed to go on computers or watch or listen to popular media. She was home-schooled and had to focus on her studies. She meditated, didn't celebrate birthdays or holidays, and wore hand me down clothes. All this because of her Grandpa's principles, not because he couldn't afford to give her things. Her Grandpa feared wealth would corrupt her. He wanted Sara to learn that "you can have a wonderful life that is rich and fulfilling and overflowing with love." He didn't want her to "become an imitative assemblage of other imitative assemblages, contaminated with every desire and so-called need festering in the world beyond our security walls." Grandpa seemed like an obsessive compulsive hippy. At one point Sara asked is he was autistic and her Grandma said "to be a male is to be slightly autistic." He ate the same food at the same time and had the same routine year after year. He was so rigid. Poor Sara was subjected to that. Ironic that his work reflected the total opposite of his beliefs. Nonetheless, Sara loved him and was beyond loyal to him.

The creation of Michael, Sara's bioroid, was very strange. They used Sara's own cells to create him and they would be able to enter each other's thoughts and control each other's bodies. Why anyone would want to

create something like this is beyond me. What would be the purpose of this? During the process, Sara caught a glimpse of her "brother" and described him as a " headless, fully grown man whose chest had been carved open right down the middle. Suspended in a large tube was liquid with a brain with blood vessels and white cords leading down from it to lungs, a stomach, liver." If this if the future of reproduction, that is quite repulsive. And Sara was going to be linked to this person forever both in thoughts and actions. What was her Grandpa thinking?

Of course, there was much political and social controversy surrounding all of these androids and bioroids and not just in the U.S. It was a global problem. America was about to pass laws to destroy all androids, but they didn't like the sound of that. Neither did a lot of humans. So some took off to the moon and for Mars. Many innocent people were killed and we got to see the toll it took on the bioroids too. Again, a very relevant book showing the consequence of using technology to manipulate our genetics to create a better human.

There was a romance in this book as well between Sara and Elio. Sara's family,was close with Elio's and they were almost like brother and sister but they developed a tentative relationship that proved challenging. There were some interesting and disturbing twists in it. This wasn't surprising in this kind of book.

I really enjoyed this book. It was very intelligent and thought provoking. Jim Bainbridge created a future that is very realistic and bleak. All the more reason for us to read his novel and take some notes. Highly recommended for anyone who cares about our species's future.

Joy says

I really tried to read this book because I normally like sci fi. I just couldn't get into it at all.

I was intrigued at the beginning when the girl is getting interrogated. After that, the plot just got boring. There's something about her and an illegal android. There's also this boy that she meets and becomes friends with but it kind of plods on and on so I just stopped reading.

Kathy Jordan says

Bizarre in a good way. Honestly thought the story a bit confusing at times but still couldn't put it down. When finished was very glad it was fiction. Very dystopian view of the world orders, but also hit a real tone in view of todays politics, real and scary. Simply put we are not safe in our little cocoons we live in. While Science fiction in the truest sense had a ring of potential reality.

Jess Hanna says

Human Sister, where do I begin?

I loved the concept of exploring android expression of emotions and whether or not consciousness is what gives a created being a personality, soul, etc. I also enjoyed seeing 'the other side' of the ethical debate over human experimentation.

The relationship between Sara and her parents, grandparents, 'brothers', and lover/husband were real and visceral. I could appreciate the expression of Sara's emotions in light of the various challenges she faced. The idea of a war waged on humans by the very creatures we created was also deeply intriguing. I often found myself getting lost in the story.

I cannot, however, recommend this book. There is far too much graphic sexual content for my taste. It was superfluous in all circumstances and brought the story down, in my opinion. If it was not for that, I could have easily given it at least four stars and recommend it for lovers of science fiction.

Kat says

Human Sister is a well thought out, cleverly orchestrated story that follows the life of an isolated and manipulated girl who faces some of the worst parts of humanity. Her encounters include not only the actions of zealots but sometimes the cold and scientific nature exhibited by members of her own family. In spite of it all, she ultimately becomes the vehicle for change, but not in the way you think.

This novel explores what it is that makes us human, both the good and the bad, but that's not the end of it. Is it possible to create Artificial intelligence that isn't sentient? When does technology go too far? Can Androids be trained to feel as humans do?

This highly emotional story of man meets machine is stunning and heart wrenching.

I'm not going to say that I couldn't put it down, because I HAD to put it down and remind myself that Sarah isn't real.

Eileen says

This started out as a sweet 16 kind of sci-fi. But it turned into a very thoughtful examination of AI. There's no happy ending, but it was complete.

Ros says

It was a thought-provoking book. I was a little disconcerted because it was written in the first person, with present-tense interjections - oh, and unfortunately there was you-know-what in it. Not just references to it, but descriptions of the actual thing. Let's just say: I would not recommend it to my Church friends...That is why I gave it only one star.

I loved the use of slightly-difficult words, showing a good vocabulary, and the characters were on the whole well-drawn, although I felt the main character, Sara, was a little *too* unrealistic.
