

By: ~~Barry Ziff~~ ~~February 2008~~, Science News Editor

## **The Robot Invasion Begins!**

### *First automated gas filling station opened*

So be it then! We should at least look at the bright side of the whole deal. No more stepping out of the car, no more getting dirty or smelling of petrol after a quick refuel. The automatic refueling unit was developed by an inventor from Netherlands who is also a gas station owner, and is the first of its kind in the world working in a gas-pumping station. Ouch! That will really drive some unemployed people mad. Nico van Staveren said in an interview that he got the idea while visiting a farm and saw the robotic arm used for milking the cows, and started thinking that he could build a similar device that would fill the tank of a car on its own. If it were to go into mass production, a model could cost up to 110,000 U.S. dollars. However, it does not work on all types of cars, just on the models that do not require a specific key to open the gas cap in order to gain access to the fuel tank. Secondly, if the oil crisis which may peak this year continues, it might just be worth it to have a precision robot and make waste of precious resources. It is fitted with a series of optical sensors that take images of the vehicles as it enters the gas station. It then searches for the models in its own database to establish the sequence of maneuvers it needs to execute. Once this task is performed, then it can pass towards filling up the tank. With the help of a robotic arm, the device opens the exterior flap to gain access to the gas cap, after which it will proceed to unscrewing it. After this is done, it extends the fuel nozzle into the tank opening and begins the actual filling process. If you are a SciFi fan, you are probably already having a deja-vu. Such as that of the Texaco automated gas filling station from the Back to the Future: Part II film, in 1989, or even the blue collar robot from "The Velvet Glove" story, written by Harry Harrison in 1956.