

INTERMISSION #142

E-zine by Ahrvid Engholm, ahrvid@hotmail.com, for EAPA, N'APA and others who like yellow and blue! Follow @SFJournalen's Nordic fan news (posted 1-2 times/week, lack of time alas). Musk+Putin=True? Ah, life would be boring without typos! Late Feb 2024.

Editorially: Robots, Musk, AI

We'll dwell a little bit into robots in this #'s history dpt. Artificial Intelligence and self-driving cars has made this topic rather hot. Isaac Asimov invented, in a way, the modern robot in the 1940s, building on Rossum's Universal Robots Karel Capek let loose in the 1920s as he coined the word "robot" (Asimov in his turn coined "robotics"). While not everyone agrees that the three Asimovian laws of robotics should be built into robots - it wouldn't be very useful for the drones crushing Russians in Ukraine! - they are surely useful for self-driving cars! Cars shouldn't hit people (Law 1!), they should go where you want (Law 2) and generally avoid crashes (Law 3).

Robot-like figures in some form - in religious legends, moving statues, simple "automatons" etc - have been around ancient times. Skilled mechanics built machines to perform simple tasks. But the "chess-playing Turk" was a fake with a little person being hidden inside the machinery. Edgar Allan Poe was BTW early in debunking this chess fraud in his essay "Maelzel's Chess-Player", <https://www.chess.com/blog/batgirl/e-a-poe-and-the-turk> and <https://en.chessbase.com/post/edgar-allan-poe-vs-the-turk> Poe noted that, unlike with math equations, in chess there is no pre-determined way to go from A to B, so how could fixed mechanics "decide" among many options?

However, there is so much written and done about robots that *Intermission* can only cover a few things. Sf films included robots regularly in the 1930s, but the first robot films came even before Capek. Harry Houdini did it already in 1919. (Remember that when you see a link, just click and it opens from inside you PDF viewer.)

We'll concentrate one early robots. The pulps were full of them, but many of the pulp robots just tried to kidnap human women and eradicate humanity, so we better skip it. The *Elektro* robot of the NY World's Fair became famous around the time of the first Worldcon. From the movies Robbie of *Forbidden Planet* became a celebrity, and later C3PO and R2D2 didn't exactly make our mechanical friends less popular. You'll also get a look into the new Elon Musk bio, this odd man of Mars who pioneers self-driving cars.

The Swedish astronaut Marcus Wandt landed Feb 10, getting a few extra space days due to bad weather in the sea outside Florida. There were 11 astronauts in the ISS from nine different countries during his stay - actually, Wandt is Norwegian citizen too, so make it 10 countries. It's more than cringey that a couple of them were Russians... Anyway, the commander at the time, Andreas Mogensen of Denmark got together with Marcus Wandt for a Nordic summit...



Danish-Swedish space summit on ISS.

AI makes new robots smarter. Better battery technology - a cross-benefit from the self-driving cars - gives robots better endurance. We may get a ketchup bottle effect: when you shake the bottle first very little comes, shake again and very little comes, and shake some more...suddenly a lot of ketchup comes! Ray Kurzweil talked about "reaching the singularity" when AI and robots become smarter than we, and it may come earlier than we think! And if someone forgot to set an end-condition to the algorithms it's possible we'll all turn into paperclips...

I hope and believe that the algorithm for getting rid of Russians in Ukraine is simple: send drone, find target, shoot, send drone, find target...until there are no Ruskis left or they realise they're just Putin's canon fodder and refuse to fight. The EU has just committed ca €55b to Ukraine. The USA senate has approved another €50b, but it's unclear what it takes to convince a stupid minority in the House to release this much-needed package. Everyone who saw Tucker "Sucker" Carlson's so called interview with Vladimir Assholovich realise the man is deranged. Tucker too. Several commentators I've seen claim that though Trump has fanatical supporters, they are too few. The main problem is that some Democrat voters won't feel comfortable with Biden's age - he's 81 (Trump is 77, but lives a more "unhealthy" life than "sleepy Joe", as Trump called him in last election when he was...77!). I



Five interesting Stockholm buildings. The GLOBE hockey/concert/etc arena. Biggest spherical building in the world, until some Las Vegas thingy recently opened. / THOR'S TOWERS 125 m tall residential buildings. / CITY HALL, maybe the fanciest city hall in the world! Hosts the Nobel banquet every December. / Stockholm's OLYMPIC STADIUM from 1912. The oldest Olympic stadium still in regular use: soccer/track&field/concerts./ The VASA MUSEUM. The inside is the deal here. Houses the almost complete 1600s warship Vasa, sinking on its maiden trip and 300 years later raised. The oldest and only warship of the era and a must to see! can't figure out why someone would vote for a serial criminal of 1) sexual offences, 2) economic crimes, 3) espionage crimes by mishandling secret documents and 4) inciting rebellion against the government. Trump makes Nixon seem like a swell guy in comparison!

Some good news is that Sweden has announced her 15th aid package to Ukraine worth around €700m. It includes: more Combat Vehicles (Denmark is into this too), artillery and ammo, mines and mine clearing stuff, anti-tank and anti-air weapons, medical equipment and interestingly 10 combat



TV showed Hungarian parliament vote live. 188 Yes, 6 No.

boats! These fast, armed reconn/attack/troop transports are made for narrow straits in the Swedish archipelagos and should work well around Crimea and on Ukraine's rivers. We will also train 18 000 soldiers. It's our biggest



Ten combat boats are donated to Ukraine.

aid package to date and now when the NATO membership is approved there's talk about releasing Gripen fighters. Swedish Ukraine aid is to date ca €3b, which adjusted for population is more than the US. Europe is stepping up while some US congressmen are sleeping in their benches...

Finally, Feb 26 the Hungarian parliament voted for the Swedish membership in NATO. PM Ulf Kristersson went to Budapest and sold Hungary four more Gripen (Hungary already has 14) and voila! - doors opened!

--Ahrvid Engholm

RIP: Klaus Johansen 1954-2023

Leading Danish fan Klaus Johansen died Jan 15...2023! That's over a year ago but I only recently learned about it (and nobody else in Swedish fandom heard of it earlier, which shows interfannish contacts with the Danes aren't perfect). He was 69, and when asking around in Danish fandom I learned he in August 2022 revealed he suffered from Parkinson's disease (info from Flemming Rasch). It's in itself usually not deadly but may weaken the body, so his demise may have had some connection to it. At the time the bloody C-virus was still around, so something relating to that can't be ruled out. Carl-Eddy Skovgaard went to his funeral and gave me a link to a picture of his casket. (Thanks! Also to Knud Larn who provided the other pics!)

Klaus was a major fanzine publisher (main publication *Hvad Skovsøen Gemte* with news and booklists), an antiquarian book-seller operating under the same name, doing bibliographies incl a Danish fanzine bibliography, a Danish-Fannish dictionary, publishing *Fynzine 84* which with 156 pages is said to be the thickest Danish fanzine ever. Overall he was quite active, excluding perhaps the last few years. A real BNF!

I had a lot of contacts with Klaus. In the 1980s while on an Interrail trip (Interrail a cheap go-as-you-please-for-a-month train ticket for Western Europe) I visited him in Odense. We sat a whole evening drinking Danish beer and listening to British 1960s rock. I remember one of his favourite bands was Small Faces. We had him as Guest of Honour at our Local Nasacon in 1988. Later in the 1990s Klaus experimented with making dingbat fonts. He contacted me and asked for small drawings he could convert. I didn't take it too seriously and scribbled down a stack of small drawings which became the font FANDOM.TTF - which is still around! Had I known it'd be long-lived I would have put more effort



Klaus left, outside his bookshop. The shop's name, from a famous novel, means Hidden on the Forest Island.

it... Anyway, check eg

<http://legionfonts.com/fonts/fandom-dingbats>. And roaming around I found another, conventional font that Klaus made: <https://www.fonts4free.net/klaus-johansen-font.html> He was quite creative!

We learn Klaus' Youtube account is still around <https://www.youtube.com/listemageren> but nothing had been posted there since 2016. But his site <http://www.klaus-johansen.dk> is deleted. I did meet him on a Danish con in the 1990s, but I wonder if he was also on the Eurocon in Copenhagen in 2007. I don't remember.



The casket for Klaus. We miss you, buddy!

I remember Klaus as a soft, gentle person, to a degree hiding his achievements under a bushel. Danfandom is much poorer without him.

Great Skiing in North America

Cross-Country skiing, AKA Nordic skiing, is popular in the Nordic region (not so much in Denmark, perhaps), in Russia (but Russia isn't too popular with us and is banned from international competitions) and to an increasing degree in North America. Or so it seems.

I February the World Cup of the discipline crossed the pond. First Canada and a place called Canmore and then the US and Minneapolis. For Canada it was 5 years since last WC and for the US 23 (!) years. There was a WC planned there earlier, but some bloody virus postponed it. Both events were outsold, meaning ca 30 000 spectators, and expectations were especially high in Minneapolis, thanks to World Cup leader Minnesota's skiing queen Jessie Diggins who lobbied hard for the event coming to Minneapolis.

But the Swedish skiers impolitely had their say in the races, ie the women's team (the Swedish men's team is busy preparing for *future* feats, but aren't ready just yet...). Out of five North American races the Blondes won four and had three podium spots on the side. Linn Svahn took a sprint (a 2 km high pace race), Frida Karlsson a 10 km, and Jonna Sundling took both a sprint and a 10 km. Jessie D had to settle for one podium, being third in a 10 km. Jonna is double World and Olympic sprint champ, but this was her first *distance* win - anything not a sprint is called a distance race. Leader of the

sprint cup, a part of the WC, is Linn Svahn though. Linn is also second in the WC totals, but here Jessie Diggins has a comfortable lead and will likely win the WC Crystal Globe. Linn, winning five sprints this season, has to settle for the sprint Globe.

But, the *huge upset* for last!

The men's 10 km in Minneapolis was won by one....Gus Schumacher! Of Alaska, from the US of A! Last I checked Alaska wasn't for sale to Mr P



Gus Schumacher winning.

Shithead in Moscow. It was the first US victory in the WC since 1983 (by freestyle pioneer Bill Koch, but it's another story). A US victory on home soil was good for the sport and the crowds were overjoyed!

The Swedes had problems with cancelled flights on the way back. They hardly had time to shower to catch alternate connections, so according to Frida:

"We'll probably have to sit in our racing outfits, smelling bad..."

But it was worth it.

Elon Musk, Robots and Space

The Swedish word for guided missiles is - robots! As in Robot 70, a close range anti-air missile that now does its duty in Ukraine. The logic calling it "robot" is that as a guided missile it steers itself, like a robot.

I've recently read Walter Isaacson's biography *Elon Musk* (in Swedish, more on the super-quick translation RSN), a guy heavy into robotics and self-driving cars, space and AI and what have you. One of his projects is the human-shaped robot *Optimus*, the most or among the most advanced robots today. The goal is to make a robot that can do most things people can - being human-shaped helps a lot - and take orders and interact. From what I've seen Optimus is a couple of steps



Jonna grabbing one of her two victories in Minneapolis.



There was junior events in Feb too. Here's double Junior World Champ Evelina Crusell. Anchoring the relay she not only ate 21 sec on the final stretch to catch Norway, but added 14s to win gold. 35s in 5 km! Our next skiing queen.



towards making like Asimov proud. The development in AI we've seen the last few years helps a lot.

The 720+ pages thick Musk biography by Walter Isaacson (translation Menne Svensson and Daniel Hellsin, publisher Fri Tanke; to the 720 pages add 40 more for sources, references, notes and index) gives us much of the situation right now about the most spoken about person on the planet. Whether it is about electric Tesla cars which outsells the E-vehicles from all other car companies and increasingly runs around driverless. Or his plans for getting feet on the Martian ground or Internet from space everywhere through 40 000 Starlink satellites. We also have his Twitter takeover, promoting free speech, rebranding it X, a letter here also indicating an unknown future for the service... And his ideas for brain-electronics connections, humanoid robots, transports through underground tubes. Unfortunately he has also also meddled in Putin's Ukraine war in a not too positive way and has spread tweets around not showing much brilliance.

In an afterword Isaacson says he for this book got daily access to Musk for two years, and also lots of personal files, correspondence and access to the crowd around Musk, who himself says he is in the Asperger spectrum. And further: Musk made no changes in the book, didn't even demand to read it before publication.

But here's a strange thing: The text covers events until April 2023. From the moment the 760+ pages were finished it somehow began to be translated to Swedish, edited and printed in just over 4 months! My SFJ newsletter notes the book came here in September 2023 - a feat that seems impossible. Mr translators must have used AI translation. I guess they ChatGPTed the original English text and then simply went through it as a sort of super proof-reading.

There are some strange translations. Eg someone is assigned to "kommendera" a space mission, a Swedish word meaning approx to stand and shout commands! The English "to command" should instead be translated as "ta befäl över" ("take command of"). Asimov's late Zeroth Law of robotics is called "Zerothlagen" not realising it should be called "nollte lagen". "Vine" is translated to "vinrankor" as if it was wine and not ordinary "växtrankor". Finding wine growing in a rocket pit is unlikely. Some technical terms are mistranslated and the word-order is sometime a bit awkward. But overall the translation could be much worse. AI-translation is generally getting surprisingly good. I've noted that before in tests I've done. I suspect human translators in soon will stand in line outside job centres...



My view of this man named Musk is split. As a long-time space fan, I applaud his achievements with Space X and while his ideas of Mars colonisation may not be wholly realistic - it's the right spirit! His Tesla cars have been an unexpected success with AI-driven automatic navigation, and an important factor is that it may save 10 000s of lives! While self-driving cars have crashed their accident rate is far, far lower than for human drivers! Next he'll build Asimov type robots and connect the brain to computer chips.

But while he has helped Ukraine in their defence through Starlink connections, he has sometimes swayed towards war-criminal Putin. Starlinking hasn't always, at Mr Musk's whim, been available, eg for a planned attack on the Russian fleet. I'm positive towards that he wants less censorship for Twitter (the idea of letting freedom of expression depend on private company "laws" is unacceptable) but I'm afraid his general style and other ideas may destroy this channel. I've been on Twitter since 2011 with @SFJournalen. As a principle I never pay for any service on the net, so if Musk starts to demand money or limits

usability unless you pay I'm afraid I'll have to find something else. Also: I'd like to continue with the domain name "Twitter" since I've already spent 13 years spreading the address <https://twitter.com/SFJournalen> But we'll see how the future with Twitter will be.

Musk is obsessed with the letter X. It also turns up in SpaceX. One of his young sons has been named "X" - and is called X through this biography - and he has 10 children more! I get an impression



he consciously wants more children since he thinks his DNA is so valuable that it must be spread around... There is such people. But Musk does take good care of his offspring, except one who has turned trans and said bye-bye to all further contacts with him.

Musk is an excellent engineer and planner, but a rotten boss and a walking social disaster. In this book we read how he fires employees to left and right (lately especially to the left) if they disagree with him. Musk knows best and it actually seems he does in *most* cases! But even in cases when he is wrong you risk getting fired for pointing it out.

He runs his companies according to his "algorithm", which I'll summarise thus:

- 1. Question every requirement. Each should come with the name of the person who made that requirement. Then you can start questioning whether these requirements make sense. No matter how smart or how 'powerful' that person is.*
- 2. Delete any part of the process you can. Delete just a bit more than you feel comfortable with. In fact, if you do not end up adding back at least 10% of them, then you didn't delete enough."*
- 3. Simplify and optimize. Only when you have walked through steps one and two can you start by simplifying. It protects you from doing unnecessary work. Common mistake is to simplify and optimize a part or a process that should not exist.*
- 4. Accelerate cycle time. Find ways to speed up your bureaucratic processes. Tesla spent a lot of time accelerating processes that should have been deleted."*
- 5. Automate. Look at what what you can potentially automate. A mistake with Tesla's factories was trying to automate every step. They should have waited until all the requirements had been questioned, parts and processes deleted, and the bugs were shaken out.*

About point 5: Musk spent a lot of time on the actual workshop floor studying every station of the Tesla production line, deleting unnecessary steps, simplifying...but also de-automating some stations. When he found that a robot arm worked slower than if a human performed that work moment, he removed the robot and let that production station be human operated. Musk actually personally spend days and weeks crawling on the floor of his factories to find bugs and speed things up. When people come with information he fires off a barrage of detailed technical questions.

A part of Musk's successes is that he always wants to speed up operations and is willing to take risks. If there is a low but still increased risk a SpaceX rocket will fail, Musk usually order i to be launched anyway. That's why some SpaceX launches have exploded, but it's also a reason why SpaceX launches more rockets into space than NASA and all others combined. Musk tend to see such things as necessary: by testing and see what fails you can improve. His constant push for speed in design, development and implementation is a reason for his successes. I guess he wants to see his Mars program started while he is alive and well.

Musk is often personally involved in design decisions, whether it is the Raptor engines of his rockets or the Tesla cars. He is responsible for many of design decisions. For his rockets I see three major - almost quantum leap! - design decisions that I as and old space fan like:

- 1. The technique to make stages reusable. by letting them land back on Earth. It cut costs dramatically!*

2. To use methane instead of liquid hydrogen as fuel for the Starship. Methane is cheaper and easier to handle than LH2 and still gives almost the same exhaust velocity, and is of course superior to kerosene.
3. To use special steel instead of much more expensive carbon fibre or titanium or weaker aluminium. It's easier to weld and steel better stands high temperatures and re-entry into the atmosphere.

Politically Musk seems to have shifted from being a run-of-the-mill Democrat to be more libertarian and anti-woke. How he's going to balance this with Twitter is a problem. His actions at one point made 80% of all advertisers run away, which was balanced by that Musk fired 75% of the staff, many in the "moderating" departments. But Musk himself could use some moderation, since he sometimes fire off tweets he later have reasons to regret.

He isn't a typical billionaire. He doesn't seem to care much for personal consumption. Yes, he has bought property for tens of millions, but recently - if I have the time-frame correct - he sold most of it off and made a modest two-room apartment near his space base in Boca Richa his home. He does have a private jet, but it's probably necessary as he constantly move around to his different factories and company headquarters. He personally engages in the about half a dozen different companies he has founded. And BTW, Musk was "only" one of five co-founders of Tesla, but over time step by step took over the company and the other four have left or been fired.

But the fact is that Tesla would have hardly survived without Musk. Before launching the mass market Tesla 3, the company was just a few weeks from bankruptcy. They only produced 1200 cars a week but needed to do 5000/week to be profitable. Through production line improvements - Musk crawling on the floor over details - they increased production of the two lines to 3300 - but more was needed. So what did they do?

They set up a tent! On the big parking lot outside the factory they set up a 300 metres long tent structure. They didn't have time or planning permission for a building, and it would take years anyway. And in this tent they put up a third production line. By this Tesla reached it's production goal, the market was pleasantly surprised and Tesla became worth more than all the other car companies.

These are some snippets from the very-well-worth-to-read Isaacson biography. I wish him luck with his space projects and there are big advantages with his self-driving cars. His projects of building robots and neural links are exciting. Musk has his fingers in the AI-jar too. I basically agree with his skepticism against all Politically Correct but don't think he is himself "correct" always. I hope he'd believe less in the ramblings of Putin. His Starlink hassle to stop Ukrainians hitting the Russian navy in Sevastopol was due to he imagined Putin would go nuclear - but as we have seen, Mr P wouldn't dare to do that.

Elon Musk is an interesting, innovative, influential person who should be important for our future.

Yeah, and in his youth he read a *lot* of science fiction, Asimov and Heinlein being among his favourites. He doesn't have time for that now.

Short Story Masters Plan Public Meeting



Two pieces of news from The Short Story Masters society, often mentioned here, which had its yearly business meeting Feb 17. First a new member was inaugurated, one Richard Nordström author of several novels and short stories. He seems nice but I don't know much about him. He's a friend of founder Kjell Genberg.

The second piece of news is that the society plans a public event in Uppsala 21 April in the House of Literature. We will talk about writing and read stories. I'll have a slot where I'll talk about writing science fiction. We'll see how it goes and how many people turn up. The site takes ca 50. After the formal business we consumed hot dogs, with mustard and ketchup and something you haven't heard of: *Boston cucumber!*



Boston Cucumber.

It is chopped and pickled cucumber, with a little paprika and onion and spices. It was invented by the Swedish food company Felix, needing to find a way to use leftovers from producing gherkins. As Far As I Know it's virtually unknown elsewhere. That there is American sounding food no one heard of is no stranger that nobody Sweden have heard of the Swedish Fish candy...

Boston Cucumber goes down very well with hot dogs!



Clockwise from Left: Ulf Broberg, Helena Sigander, Ahrvid's chair, Kjell Genberg, Cecilia Wennerström, Richard Nordström, Lena Köster. Ulf Durling, white-haired in prev pic, left early.

HISTORY CORNER



This is how it all started! Fandom had been going for about four years, but it achieved a significant boost with a major magazine behind it, sponsoring an organisation. This initial announcement is from the April issue of Wonder Stories, but Wikipedia claims Gernsback started SFL in February. Was the April issue out in February or what? Anyway, SFL lasted until 1943, Wiki says, but at that time fandom had consolidated and didn't need the League. LASFS, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, was one of the first "chapters" of the SFL and still exists, being the oldest active sf club in the world. Wiki says an organisation named the Science Fiction League of America was started in the 1950s, connected to the radio show "Tales of Tomorrow", apparently an authors group - among members, were Asimov, Boucher, Sturgeon - but it didn't last long. There's very little information about this SFL. Neither Fancyclopedia

nor SF Encyclopedia has anything. Do you know something?

Below what a newsstand looked like back in the days. It's probably towards the end of the pulp era (probably early 50s, it definitely ended in 1957 when the last distributor of the pulps, the American News Company, was liquidated). I've tried to mark magazine types. The girlie mags were surprisingly many and had their own spread. And just above them we find other *disreputable* publications: the sf magazines.



Paraphernalia the League sold.



Here's a picture said to be from 170 Upper Newtownards Road, ie *The Oblique House*, HQ of famed Irish Fandom with Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, James White, John Berry and others, who produced *The Enchanted Duplicator*, *Hyphen*, *Slant* and more, that made the *Big Wheels of IF* world famous! In the attic they played ghoddminton. To the right of the entrance the sitting room to which Madeleine Willis brought tea for the fangatherings in her 20 gallon teapot. The centre of fandom from late 1940s to 1965.

It doesn't correspond exactly with a sketch in Fancyclopedia https://fancyclopedia.org/File:Bob_Shaw_Cartoon_Oblique_House.jpg, but that sketch could be wrong. It says it was drawn from memory by Bob Shaw a long time afterwards. About the last meeting we read:

At a house-cooling party the occasion was marked by a simple but moving ceremony attended by all Irish fandom. In the fan attic the last ghoddminton service was solemnly performed by Bob Shaw. Symbolically, it was not returned. Instead the last shuttlecock was picked up by John Berry and reverently removed to its final resting place, a time capsule donated by Sadie Shaw.

*Also in the glass, cylindrical two pound capsule were deposited a copy of *The Enchanted Duplicator* (1st edition), some hyphens in printing type, used for *Slant*, a dollop of duplicating ink, James White's first bow tie (symbolising the professional element of IF) and signatures of the great fans and good friends who had stayed at Oblique House during the years... The time capsule was then buried in the front lawn, underneath the cherry tree, in earth with which had been mingled the sacred soil of South Gate, donated by Rick Sneary. A fannish era had ended.*

We promised to cover robots... They have been around as artificial men, mechanical contraptions, mythical figures for a long time, but known as robots since about 1920 and Karel Capeks play "*Rossum's Universal Robots*", from the Czech - and Slavic - for work or worker. But how to power



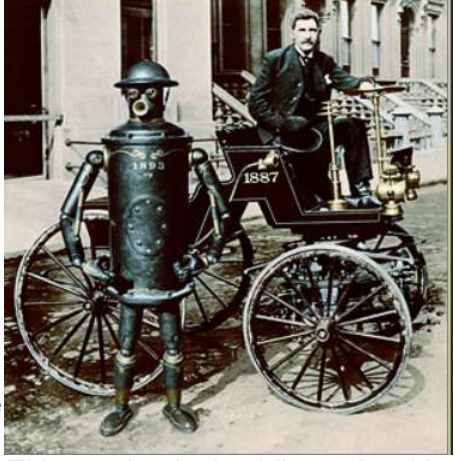
Oblique House.





The Turkish Chess player is a well known fraud fascinating people in the 19th Century.

robots? Steam was universally used, so that's the way Edward S Ellis' "Steam Man of the Praries" (1868) went. Remember reading Ellis' Indian books when young - but we missed his steam man! He was plagiarised in "Frank Reade and his Electric Man" (1885), who later turned up with a robotic horse too. We also got mechanical soldiers, like Boilerplate, "unveiled in 1893 by professor Archibald Campion. Boilerplate "served with Roosevelt's rough riders and fought alongside Pancho Villa." Yeah.



This mechanical soldier rode with Theodore Roosevelt, it is claimed.

The word "android" is actually older than "robot". One Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's used it in *Tomorrow's Eve*, 1886, "a



Televox, a phone switch board given a robot shape

symbolist sf novel" according to Wiki, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Future_Eve

Or according to Goodreads.com:

Even after 100 years, this is a captivating fable - witty and biting - of a Thomas Edison-like inventor who creates the radiant and tragic android Hadaly, and the lovelorn aristocrat who falls for the manmade perfect woman who is conveniently adjustable so he may make her at his will to his taste and social needs.

You can find it in English, here: <https://annas-archive.org/md5/5e3c1affb735c06858e14b579d11d2d3>

Moving on! Let's peek into <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot>

Who but the great Houdini used mechanical men in one of his short films, "The Master Mystery", 1919, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zipdW_YOM3g&list=PLF0C9A1A847C9A88D&index=1



The British robot Eric, 1928.



"The Mechanical Man" from 1921

A rather unique film, thought to be lost but 40% of it was rediscovered, was the Italian "The Mechanical Man", 1921: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNo0Is0JPPo>

The Televox built by Westinghouse in 1926 wasn't a "real" robot but a telephone switch system given a robotic shape.

The British weren't far behind and in 1928 presented the robot Eric:

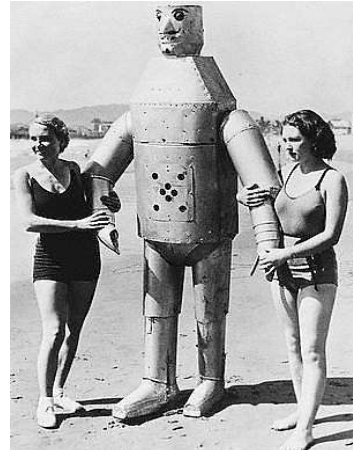
"to open the Exhibition of the Society of Model Engineers at London's Royal Horticultural Hall...At the event's opening, Eric rose to his feet, bowed and gave a four-minute opening address, . he robot was operated by two people, and Eric's voice was received live by a radiosignal...Although able to

sit and stand, Eric could not move his legs to walk. His chest bore the letters R U R...Eric was taken on a US tour, introducing himself to an audience in New York in 1929 as Eric the robot, the man without a soul".



Houdini of course gave us a robot.

The New York Press described him as "the perfect man." A similar robot called George was later built and toured Europe and Australia. "The Age newspaper described him as "the educated gentleman, alongside his rough-hewn awkward brother". "George could deliver speeches in French, German, Hindustani, Chinese and Danish. Eric has been reconstructed in our days



Two bathing beauties catch a robot, a 1930s picture.

and is now on exhibition in London's Science Museum.

Robots became quite common in the 1930s. We found them eg in those serial adventures which often had sf ingredients. One example is "The Vanishing Shadow" from 1934. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXrjZ9vtT8Q>

Note how the robots of those days often looked rather silly...

Even the Soviets were on to it - after all "robot" is from slavic languages, "work" is "robota" in Russian. Here's "Loss of Sensation", 1935, and it is subtitled in English:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GiBhKbYBcU> The plot is rather interesting:

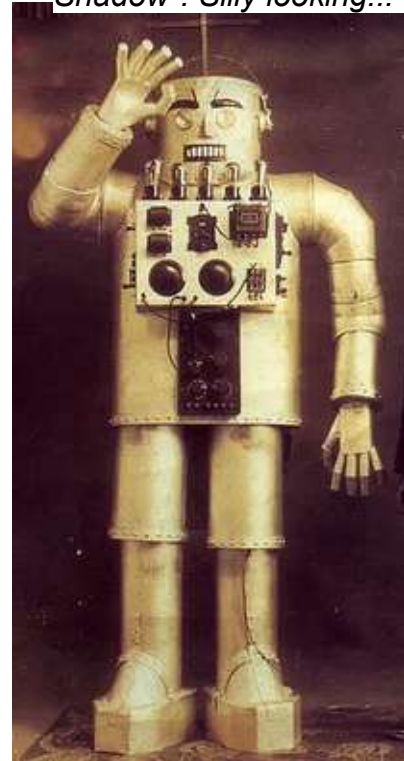
The film's plot is centered on an engineer Jim Ripple who invents universal robots to help workers, being himself from a workers' family. He theorizes that cheap production will make all goods so cheap that Capitalism will fall. The workers do not share his view and his family considers him a traitor. A key element of his invention is a high-capacity capacitor that powers the robots. The government becomes interested in the invention because the robots can be used as a weapon as well. Ripple is given a top secret factory and funding so that he can produce robots. The robots are not autonomous or intelligent, and controlled either by radio or by sound of different frequency, for which purpose Ripple uses a saxophone. When being drunk he even makes the robots to dance.



Soviet robot from "Loss of Sensation", 1935.



Robot in "The Vanishing Shadow". Silly looking...



Only known detail is that the inventor was Yasutaro Mitsui and time early 1930s



The Japanese were also into robots. See right.

Another British robot was called Alpha, introduced in 1932 and visiting the States 1934-35:

One of the most ingenious automatons ever contrived by man, a grim and gleaming monster 6 ft. 4 in. tall...Encased from head to foot in chromium-plated steel armor, Alpha sat on a specially constructed dais with its cumbersome feet securely bolted to the floor, stared impassively over the knot of newshawks and store officials waiting for the first demonstration. The creature had a great sullen slit of a mouth, vast protuberant eyes, shaggy curls of rolled metal. In one mailed fist Alpha clutched a revolver...steel giant stood up, sat down, smoked cigarettes, fired a gun and answered questions. Asked if he loved his wife, according to a Feb. 29, 1936, article in the San Diego Sun, Alpha replied, "I've a heart of steel. I don't love nobody and nobody loves me."

Alpha was described in *Practical Mechanics*, Feb 1934. And there's a short video with Alpha:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9l9pt_Jzn8

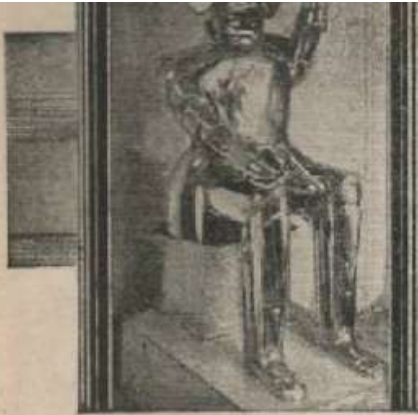


Robot kidnapping Queen Zorine of the Nudists, Balboa Park, 1935 Exposition

Randy robot kidnapping nudist girl...



Robot Alpha.



Marvels of the MECHANICAL MAN

An Interesting Description of its Possibilities and Methods of Operation.

THE mechanical man has been a subject which novelists have exploited to the full. Recent demonstrations of these mechanical creations, Robots or Automations, forcibly indicate to us that the idea is by no means so fantastic as would at first sight appear. There are many machines capable of doing work to-day which formerly could only be produced by many human beings. The machines which set the type from which these pages are reproduced are themselves almost unannoyingly human.

The Horseless Carriage

The motor car, or horseless carriage as it was formerly termed when old Mother Shipton forecast its invention, seemed an utter impossibility and was ridiculed universally by the Press of the period. When the motor car was, however, introduced it may surprise many readers to know that one of its earliest forms was that of a metal horse between the shafts of a carriage, the internal mechanism operating the metal legs and simulating almost exactly the walking or trotting motion of a horse. There are enormous motor-driven tractors in use in America to-day, on land where wheeled traffic could not possibly travel, which make use of a striding mechanism somewhat similar in action to a horse's legs.

So the mechanical man, when it was first introduced, met with the same derisive criticisms and

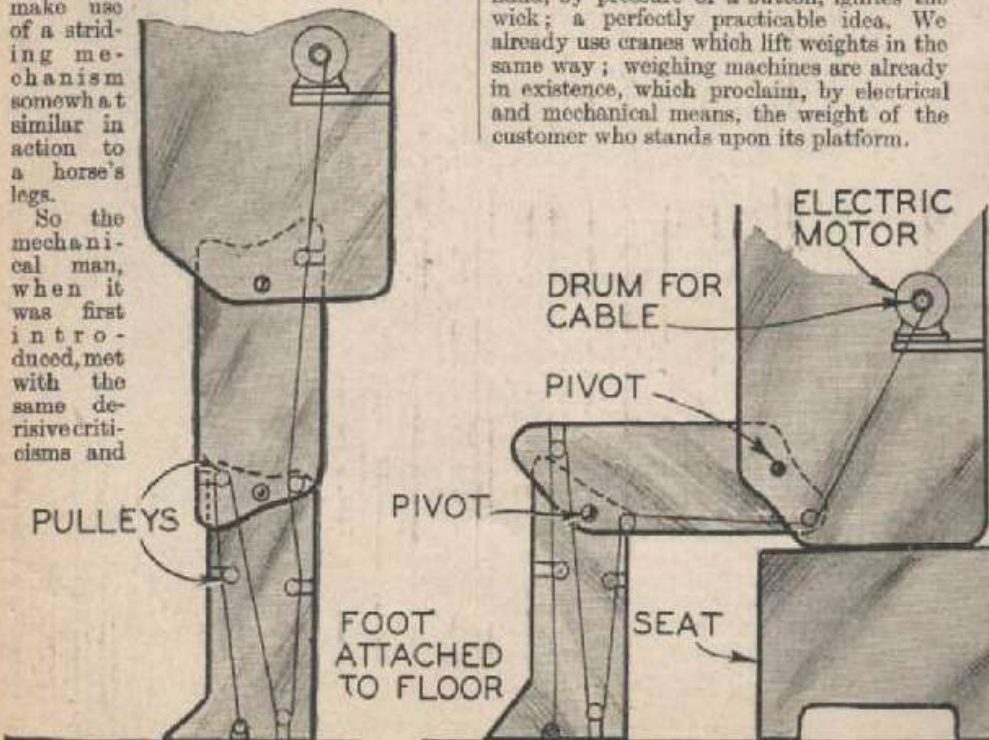


Fig. 2.—How the robot stands up. Note the small wire cable passing round pulleys. This is fixed to the foot and so pulls up the body when wound round the motor-operated drum.

sniggers from the ill-informed, possibly only because of its shape. But because an in-

Modern Inventions Make the Robot Possible

The infra-red ray can be used to count with greater accuracy than human beings, as it is already doing in many printing works; it is possible to store speech on a steel tape or a wax record, and we can now by that means virtually listen to the voice of the dead. A man may broadcast in London and the entire world can listen to him. Television is already in operation and is on the threshold of important developments.



Fig. 1.—(above) Professor J. Popjie with his mechanical man seated in an aeroplane, in which the robot actually operated the dual controls, and (right), a robot making a gramophone record on a portable machine.

ventor seeks to imitate the shape of a human being as an enclosure for a particular mechanism it does not make the idea any less practicable. For example, we could make a robot mechanical lighter, whose hand, by pressure of a button, ignites the wick; a perfectly practicable idea. We already use cranes which lift weights in the same way; weighing machines are already in existence, which proclaim, by electrical and mechanical means, the weight of the customer who stands upon its platform.



It is not such a fantastic notion therefore to concede that some mechanism in the form of a man may combine, in one homogeneous piece of apparatus, all of these modern scientific inventions. And why not? It is a simple mechanical proposition to make a device which walks, for walking machines are over one hundred years old. It is also a simple matter to make arms and hands raise weights; mechanical talking devices are almost child's play to-day, and the microphone, which is the electrical counterpart of the human ear, will respond to minute sound energies and set in motion various mechanisms. The only point which arises is whether the Robot need really take on the form of the human frame. "Horseless carriages" do not, excepting in the case mentioned earlier, employ mechanical horses, and it is a moot point whether the shape used for those Robots already produced will survive. Of course, it is spectacular and appeals to the public imagination, but it is not realised that

all of the capabilities of the Robot have been performed daily for years past by devices of less appealing, if more practical, contour.

A Robot, in whatever form it ultimately is produced, can be made to do practically everything but think. This is a mechanical age, and it would be idle to deny that the tendency is more and more to make use of mechanical appliances to do work formerly executed by human beings. The man power of the world is comparatively small; the entire population of the world could be accommodated in a box having sides only half a mile in length. Our physical strength is growing less, for the increasing use of mechanical contrivances for travel is gradually causing us to lose the use of our legs. Our mental power is increasing. It is not absurd, hence, to conjecture of a time when man has become so

not absurd, hence, to conjecture of a time when man has become so

speaker of the same type as is used in the majority of home radio sets. To add to the illusion, the mouth is invariably made to move as speech is emitted. Sounds received by the microphones are made to operate relays which, according to the type of sound, give rise eventually to movement or cause the object to "speak." Dealing first with movement, the generally adopted methods employed are as described in the following paragraphs.

How the Robot stands up

Fig. 2 gives a diagrammatic section of the leg and lower body portion of a Robot. It must be emphasized that this is not necessarily complete, but is a simplified movement, and in the best exhibition models the principle of "lazy" pulleys is carried much further in order to avoid all risk of the Robot collapsing with

foot and lower portion of the limb is continuous, so that this portion is quite rigid. At the knee, the upper portion of the leg, or thigh, is pivoted, and a further pivot is fitted between thigh and trunk. When the motor winds up the thin wire cable the lower end, being fixed, causes the body to rise as tension is put on to the wire. Upon reversing the movement with a suitable clutch to avoid the too sudden running out of the cable, the body is lowered, and through the medium of the pivots the legs fold back, giving a perfect sitting movement. The arms are moved in a similar manner, and it is only a matter of fitting a sufficiently large number of motors to enable the Robot to move independently its hands, ears, head, etc. It will generally be found that the head only rotates, a forward and backward movement being an unnecessary complication.

How the Robot Speaks

The method of providing speech for the mechanical man is actually quite simple, and the gramophone principle is employed in one form or another. In a simple Robot, a record may be made to rotate when the motor is switched on, and an electric sound-

(Continued on page 218)

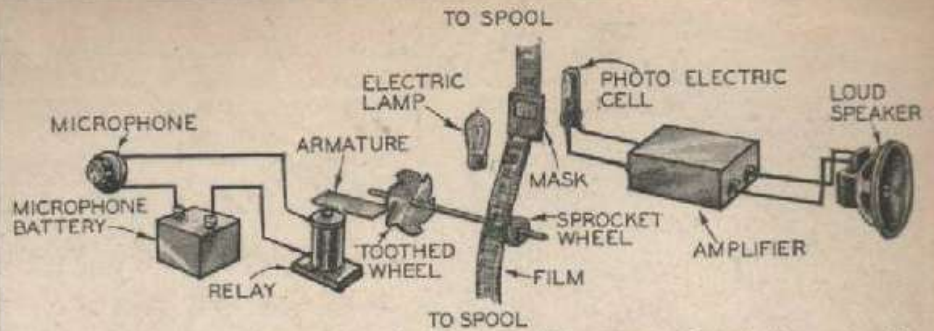


Fig. 3.—A schematic diagram of a typical robot system. When the microphone circuit is energized the armature (acting as a ratchet) is caused to rotate the toothed wheel and thence the sprocket or other mechanism.

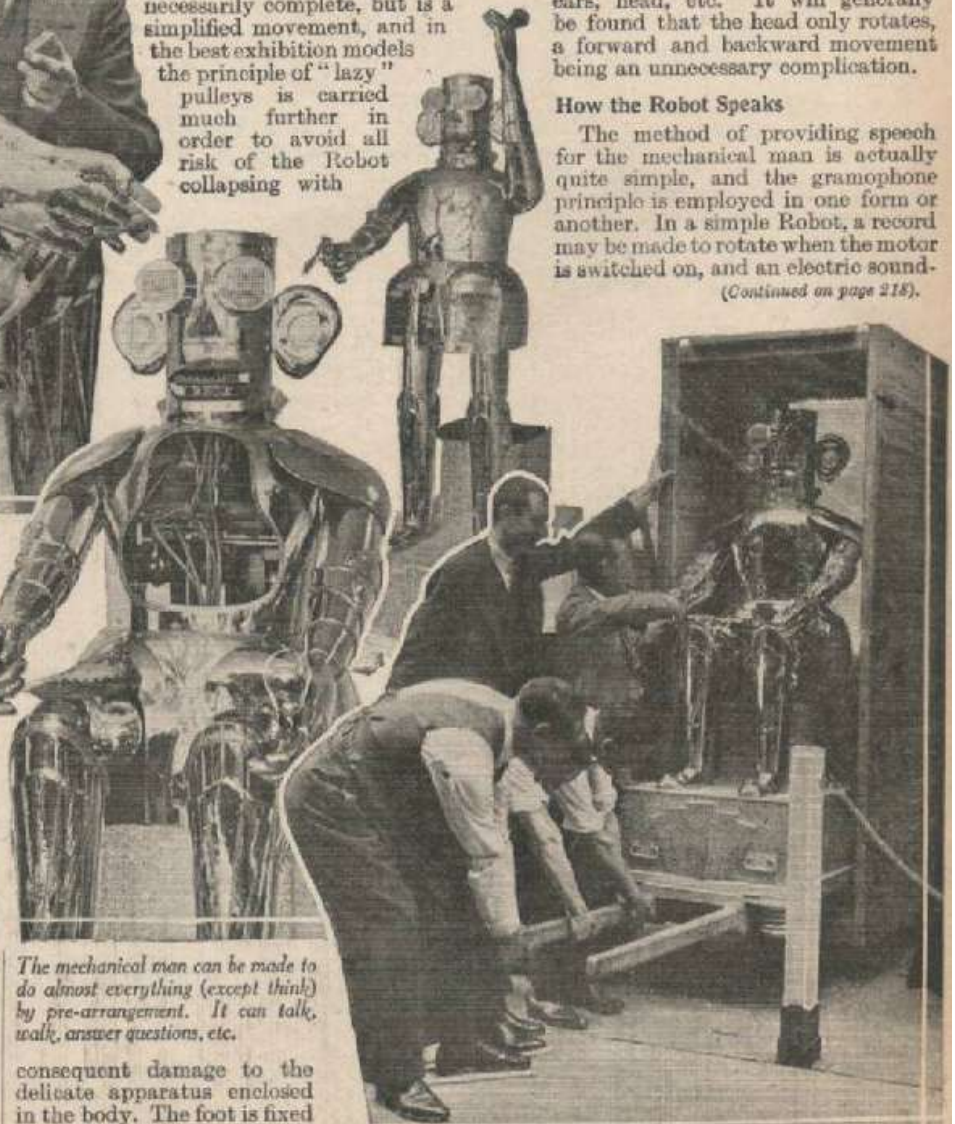


Fig. 4.—Here is an inventor helping the robot to a pipe of tobacco.

weak that he will scarcely be able to move, and will be absolutely dependent upon some form of Robot for his existence. The idea has been exploited in a play, which had as its theme the entire conquest of mind over matter, but in the end matter predominated and killed the inventor!

Apparatus Employed

At various times during the past year or so a number of Robots have toured this country, and in most cases the principles have been very similar, although differently adapted. Principally to attract attention and appeal to the man-in-the-street, the exhibition Robot is always built up in a form similar to a human being, that is, with a body, head and limbs. Furthermore, the head is furnished with "eyes," "mouth" and "ears." In some cases the "eyes" are formed by lamps, which in the case of one well-known Robot (Eric) light up as soon as he hears a question put to him. In most cases one or both of the ears are fitted with small microphones, and the mouth is simply the camouflaged opening of a good loud-



The mechanical man can be made to do almost everything (except think) by pre-arrangement. It can talk, walk, answer questions, etc.

consequent damage to the delicate apparatus enclosed in the body. The foot is fixed to the floor or base of the pedestal upon which the Robot sits. The casing of

The enormous weight of the robot (it is 9 feet high) can be gauged from this picture.

box, or pick-up, traversing the record can, through a suitable amplifier, reproduce the recorded sounds through the medium of the loudspeaker in the Robot's head. Obviously, the amount of material which can be accommodated on a record is not very great, and, furthermore, if the Robot is to answer any question put to it, the pick-up has to be deposited on the sound track of the record at a spot delivering a suitable reply. With one record only, the number of questions which can be replied to is limited. However, the sound-on-film method employed in the talkie installations provides a very much greater scope, and the only difficulty is found in providing sufficient relays to enable the film to be drawn through the "gate" to the various positions in order to deliver the correct speech. This means that the Robot, as probably many people have now found out, can only reply to a set number of questions, and for exhibition purposes these take the nature of the dates of well-known events, the time of day, the Robot's name, etc. So far, the Robot's delivery of speech is no more remarkable than the well-known weighing-machines which are now seen all over the country, and which tell you your weight when you stand on the platform and place a coin in the slot. The principal novelty rests in the manner in which the replies are given to questions asked by spectators. There is more actual novelty than mystery in this, however, when it is remembered that the question, in the majority of cases, may be given in any language, or even in nonsensical gibberish, provided the intonation follows certain predetermined lines.

A very ingenious toy which is now obtainable will assist in explaining this little

MARVELS OF THE MECHANICAL MAN

(Continued from page 209)

mystery. Very popular some years ago in America, and introduced to this country some time ago, was a toy consisting of a small kennel mounted on a base, the whole being constructed from ordinary tin-plate. Standing just inside the kennel is a ferocious-looking bulldog. Over the kennel entrance is printed in large letters the name of the dog, for instance, Fido. When you stand close to the kennel and call out "Fido," the dog jumps right out of the kennel, sliding along the tin base. At first this seems remarkable, until, perchance, you are demonstrating the toy to a friend and happen to speak rather loudly near the kennel and are surprised to see the dog jump out. Perhaps after a little experimenting you will find that the dog will come out if you call out "Tin-tacks" or any other word. With the majority of Robots, "How old are you?" will elicit the reply, "Three years" or any other pre-arranged period, but this same reply would be given if you asked, "How bold are you?" The microphone receives the vibrations of the question, and a pre-selector, designed to operate somewhat after the manner of the automatic telephone, actuated generally by an ordinary electric relay, rotates the sound-film, or recording disc, until the desired answer is brought into position, and the amplifier is then brought into action to deliver the reply. Fig. 3 shows a schematic lay-out of a microphone, relay, sound film arrangement. In this diagram (see p. 209),

if the number "One" is spoken into the microphone, or, in other words, a single impulse is received, the relay is operated during the course of which the arm of the relay bears against one of the teeth of the cogged wheel, A, and so rotates the sprocket wheel and turns the film through a certain movement. It will be appreciated, of course, that instead of film the relay could switch in an electric motor for a certain period, etc. Two impulses at the microphone circuit would rotate the toothed wheel two sections and so on.

The light-sensitive device bearing this name has already been explained in these pages, and by including one of these cells in the head of the Robot it is possible to arrange that anyone passing in front of it will bring some piece of mechanism into action and either make the Robot call out or even cause him to operate some external apparatus. Thus a bell may be placed at the side of the Robot, and a person adopting the rôle of a burglar may walk past the Robot, whereupon he will pick up and ring the bell. The General Electric Company of America have devoted considerable money and time to the design of Robots for commercial purposes, and although these have not been built in human form (as they are for utility and not exhibition purposes) they may be found fulfilling many functions in the G.E.C. works. Such routine jobs as opening up the works at a given hour (a time-operated device), blowing the cease-work hooter, starting up machinery, cutting off electric power in the event of a fault developing in a machine, sounding a fire alarm in the event of fire (a temperature-operated device), and many similar schemes are actual practical examples of Robots.

But the most famous robot was *Elektro*, built by Westinghouse, which made its debut at New York's World's Fair in 1939, 2.1m tall weighing 12 kg. Wiki writes:

...he could walk by voice command, speak about 700 words (using a 78-rpm record player), smoke cigarettes, blow up balloons, and move his head and arms. Elektro's body consisted of a steel gear, cam and motor skeleton covered by an aluminum skin. His photoelectric "eyes" could distinguish red and green light.

A video of Elektro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ay225WkU4Gs>

All of these early robots could only do simple tricks, move, say a few words from built in phonographs - most couldn't balance a heavy steel monster isn't easy.

When moving into more serious sf territory, three names shine a little stronger. *Lester Del Rey* with "Helen O'Loy" (1938), *Eando Binder* with "I, Robot" (1939) and of course *Isaac Asimov* with "Robbie" (1940, his first robot story), but all this is well-known to fans of skiffy. Ribots turned from threats to servants.

A few words about *industrial robots* which began to emerge, basically long programmable arms with a claw doing repetitive tasks along a production line. One leading industrial robot company is ASEA (acronym for General Swedish Electric Company, now merged with

Brown Boveri into ABB). If you remember earlier issues, it was ASEA engineers who in 1945 founded the Atomic Noah club that speculated in space ships, interplanetary travel and atomic wars. ASEA/ABB pride themselves with delivering the "world's first all-electric, microprocessor-controlled, commercially available industrial robot" named IRB6.



Elektro getting a cig lighted for a relaxing smoke.



Robbie from "Forbidden Planet" became a big star.



IRB6 far left claims to be the world's first electric, CPU controlled industrial robot. Here its evolution. See https://library.e.abb.com/public/c1ecdae9855e5452c1257d200053f273/24-31%202m433_EN_72dpi.pdf

Ps. Can't resist. Finally, Bob Bloch (middle) with friends in the 1930s, from the Gauer collection... (See previous issues.)



Mailing Comments

Henry Grynsten: Fascinating to read the AI's comments to the AI fanzine FaiNZINE. 1) The AI has no comment at regarding that it's an AI commenting a fellow AI. No Hey Buddy or so! 2) The comments it does have are just saying the obvious, it's so bland that it borders the meaningless. That AIs do this is something we can observe elsewhere. 3) Its comments to the poem is just a huge heap of cliches. BTW, ~~I HAVE THE TIME SINCE I'M TAKING A WORLD BREATH~~ ~~WINNING COURSE THIS SPRING SO~~ any new FaiNZINE may dry up for a while, Alsaac Aisimov notes. "Trantor is being overtaken by some strange Foundation, so things are a bit chaotic!" ■■ Hm, "abrud" meant absurd of course... As for reading skills, the good old "moral panic" works by eg actually claiming that the "victims" read sf, play games, watch movies *instead* of learning to read. Reading this blasted space stuff - game manuals, TV subtitles etc - doesn't count. ■■ I have no problems to believe that Lovecraft may very well have written an average of 10 letters per day. But the economics behind, all that postage, that's another matter, it gives room for doubt. My only suggestion is that some of the letters may have been postcards instead, and there the postage was only ø1. That would cut the costs but probably not enough. ■■ As for 70 pages long letters, I've heard rumours that you've written some very long letters at times... (The longest letter I've written was 30-35 pages or so, if I rememeber.) ■■ Rather big ships can actually reach Switzerland via the big river Rhine. So Switzerland almost have "sea ports", by the Rhine. <http://www.upper-rhine-ports.eu/en/les-ports-partenaires-3/le-port-de-bale.html> ■■ It does feel that the sf genre is in a slump right now, but it may rise again! There are several signs: 1) Sf is becoming more relevant as we today live in more of an "sf world" (pandemic, AI, numerous space projects, Putin's war). The "mundane" world - as we fans call it - is moving more into sf. More reviews and articles about the genre turns up, mainstream authors more frequently dwell into the genre, production of sf movies and TV shows increases, etc. 2) I have good hope for the continued relevance of verbal storytelling, also through written symbols (letters) as in literature. The reason is that I believe homo sapiens has been primed through 100 000s of years to be especially receptive to people telling stories. For 100 000 years or more we have gathered around camp fires and told and heard stories. While one might argue that a story on paper isn't the same, I maintain that as long as stories are told through *words* the camp fire gene kicks in. Also, as we are curious creatures, sf is the obvious literary choice for intellectual investigations. 3) People must become tired of fantasy sooner or later. Sf is the same, but without silly dragons, stupid knights and hopeless magicians. People will in the end opt for more rational things than anno dazumal, irrelevant imaginations longing for knights

and impossible "magic".

William McCabe: Please tell us why your EAPA contribution has blank pages, simply removed as things are interrupted mid-sentence. Missing pages leaves me with nothing to comment. If you want to abandon a debate, isn't it easier not to write anything - rather than first write and then remove?

Garth Spencer: "artificial intelligence is not intelligence in any way" This far AI seems a bit underwhelming IQ-wise, and while some results are impressive, others are just bizarre. ■■ "it infringes copyright" Ie, claim by some that using material for *training* would somehow be the same making a copy - which is what *copyright* is about. And I disagree. Training is the AI equivalent of just *being inspired*. Being inspired by something is not copyright "infringement". Generally, copyright holders always tend to try to claim more than they have to right to. If AIs are banned from being inspired by eg an article in the *Daily Mail*, humans would also be banned from it! We can't have that. ■■ I have written stories for a fanthology, namely *Swede Ishes 2*, but a long time ago... ■■ Poul Anderson's story was indeed about a vessel powered by bheer!



Ukrainian TV reported on the latest aid package from Sweden. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLFFEjI6-CsWe/> Now, certain US congressmen, what's your reply?



Слава Україні!