SCIENCE FICTION NEWS

No. 113
December 1990

ISSN 0156-6342

In this issue:

A NEW AUSTRALIAN SF MAGAZINE:

REVIEW OF AUREALIS ISSUE 1.

Chimaera Publications.
Editors: D. Strasser, S. Higgins.

Some sort of five-year itch must pervade the Australian SF scene; in 1969-70 we saw Vision of Tomorrow appear briefly, in '75-76 there was Void, about 1980 Futuristic Tales popped up, Far Out was around in 1985, and Aphelion broke the pattern by publication in 1987. Sadly, these, with many others earlier, have disappeared in those years between, but now AUREALIS has come back to that five year cycle in 1990.

Some of the other Oz SF magazines are mentioned in the AUREALIS editorial, but V.o.T. isn't there, probably because it wasn't fully 'ours'. As those who were around in those bygone days would remember, V.o.T wasn't *really* Oz; it contained a lot of work by a lot of overseas writers, was printed in England, and I think (my memory is incomplete, and I hesitate to go hunting my copies) it had an English editor.

But AUREALIS is the full quid, Oz editors, Oz writers, and printed (mild shudder) in Melbourne. In spite of my being a parochial Sydneyite I am prepared to agree that printing location makes it acceptably 'Australian'.

I will deal first with some mundane physical aspects of it. It's a funny size for a magazine, about 210 x 147, which is probably to suit paper and printing because it uses A4 sheets, folded to A5, but that makes it about 22 mm longer and 18 mm wider than ANALOG which is a known SF size, and it's considerably bigger than the conventional paper-back book.

Furthermore, it only contains 76 pages of text (plus four at the front and 8 pages of advertisements etc. at the back. I *know* comparisons stink, but we have to measure against *something*, and all I can find quickly is ANALOG, roughly 176 pages of text, 7 of editorial etc. and 17 of advertising. The 176 pages of text is made up of about 140 pages of fiction (some of which are pages of illustrations), and the remainder is articles, book reviews, correspondence, and odd filler paragraphs. There is, certainly, a good 130 pages of fiction in a copy of ANALOG.

Therein lies the rub, for ANALOG costs the Australian reader $5.50, and AUREALIS is priced at $6.95.

Aha! my numerate reader screams! But you have remarked that AUREALIS has *larger pages*! True, but ANALOG uses slightly smaller print, tighter line spacing and narrower margins, and even though I haven't done a word count I'm fairly sure they would have much the same number of words per page.

I have not played with the numbers to knock the effort of those who have tackled this daunting task, but to point out they have a big problem ahead of them: they are charging the reader twice what an established member of the opposition does.

Finally, on the physical aspects, the quality of the paper and the printing is high class. (Better than that opposition.) The setting-out, formatting, is also top quality.

Now to the contents, which I suppose is what matters after one has a copy in the hand and under the eyes.

Here I yield to the temptation to remark on how much harder it seems, to me, to do a critique of a collection of short stories than to perform the same task for a novel. I refer here to 'a collection of short stories', because that, effectively, is what AUREALIS is; even the longest is only some dozen pages. Please note that in spite of that sensed difficulty I have no objection to the short story per se, in fact I tend to believe that in some ways it's much harder to write than a novel. My point here is that it seems to be much harder for the critic, too.

After all, there's little *textual quantity* in even a *good* short story to write about. Consider: if, in a critique of a novel, the critic fully outlines the plot and other like factors there is still (well, in a novel of substance) a lot of enjoyable detail left for the reader. But if a critic goes to such depth about a short story there's nothing left - - - which means no-one is encouraged to buy and read. For that reason I propose in some of the following to tell very little of what the story is about, particularly what the 'punch line' is; in some cases I'll be giving no, or very little, indication of the story line and just comment on what I see as 'literary' features.

So: to the contents. As we should expect, there is an editorial, an editorial which is not the mind-stirring exercise we are used to getting from the likes of Campbell, Bova or Schmidt but more conventional, an introduction to the new publication and its contents. Quite acceptable in the circumstances.

The first fiction item is Talent by Micheal Pryor. It only runs seven pages (say 3500 words), and finishes deceptively at the bottom of a page in such a way that the reader (well, this is how I was affected) is likely to turn over expecting it to continue. I was altogether most impressed by it in concept (the idea, a new one, I believe), structure, and the way it was told. The style is easy-flowing and very readable. Full marks for an excellent opener. Indeed, apart from saying it's 'social-science SF' this is one I refuse to tell what it's all about, because I don't want to be a spoiler for anyone who reads it later.

Then there's ...And They Shall Wander All Their Days from David Tansey. It's about an interstellar exploration expedition, travelling between galaxies and beyond. So far so good, and there's some inventive ideas in it. However, even though David may express dislike in response to my comments I have to say it didn't reach me. I found two 'hard' objections, one being the size of crew (37, with a fully automated ship) and the reference to a planetary nucleus 'radiating cold instead of heat' (a statement which boggles my knowledge of thermodynamics). Then I have two 'soft' objections; first, that a vote was taken to settle whether the expedition would continue (my knowledge of organisations tells me that such a group would be strongly task-oriented and would be lead by an autocrat), and second, I got a

feeling of pessimism through it (which always makes me uneasy, I admit to being a technological optimist). Sorry, David.

Now to Sue Isle. Nightwings, which is in the other of the double-direction given in the magazine's heading: 'Fantasy and Science Fiction'. This one is in the fantasy style, although it does contain some influences of 'science'. (It will be a worthy one for discussion if I take another SF-literature class, questioning whether it's legitimate SF.) It concerns a boy who has a PC which develops the ability to write stories once given a starting hint, and I suppose we can say it takes its origin from the notion that if a million (more or less) chimps worked on typewriters for a million years (more or less) their output would include all the Shakespearian sonnets. The modern touch added into it is the idea of 'artificial intelligence'.

Sue Isle has a readable style and a nice turn of words (she refers to 'the crouching suburb', for example) including a fair quantity of realistic computer operating jargon and mother-son backchat. And the really amusing, fascinating, part of the tale is that the type of stories the computer writes *horror* stories, apparently really creepy ones, which the boy actually *sells*, someone *buys*. I didn't quite grasp the ending, but oh, well.

Next we have Terry Dowling, who is definitely one of our up-and-coming Australian writers. His contribution is In the Dark Rush which is a work of such imagination and depth that I haven't fully absorbed it after three readings. I am impressed, sufficiently, by it to believe it warrants some detailing, even at the risk of giving away the 'story line': but, then, this is a short story with that quality I suggested is in a good novel; even if the critic gives away the outline, it contains so much rich, appetising reading that it's still worth devouring in full.

I'll go as far as saying it has three characters, an extremely old space-sailor who wishes to die, a psychotic musician who has promised to help the sailor into that release, and the ship to which the sailor belongs. There are several technology-items tossed, ever so gently, discretely, into the general narrative, one being that the ship is an organic structure, not fabricated, and it becomes apparent that under Dowling's concept of interstellar flight any human passengers must be protected, by some of that technology, from harm caused by the 'jump'.

Incidentally, which of the interstellar flight conventions, a hyperspace jump or a transfer to FTL, isn't stated, but the beauty of this piece of writing is that the distinction doesn't *need* to be made.

The musician succeeds with the assisted-suicide/murder of the sailor, then refuses to be protected when the ship 'jumps' because he believes experiencing the jump will give him a moment of ecstacy. It does, but that kills him, and by that the ship is enabled to discharge seeds which will become 'ship cores'.

Now, I can't agree with Dowling's technology, it's not 'my' concept of interstellar flight, but I'm prepared to agree it's *possible*, and whether one goes along with that or not, the writing is a delight. I am reminded of Cordwainer Smith, and a

touch of some of Anne McCaffrey. The item included by Sue Isle is definitely good, but compared with this it's merely 'cute'; good, indeed, but Dowling is ahead on ideas and word use.

Next to 5 Cigarettes and 2 Snakes by Geoffrey Maloney. Well! Shades of George Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm! And told in a style which has a trace (or more) of dead-pan Damon Runyon. It's a cynical and satiric look at the way our society could be with just a little conversion, or inversion, turning upside down, over a period of the next few years. As a short story should have, it has only a few (three) central characters who play out roles to show that future society; one is the straight (terribly) man who is the narrator, one is the revolutionary, and the third (making up the obligatory triangle) is a woman with just a companion role (I think). Maloney neatly uses the characters in the process of spelling out what that society is like, how it functions, and how the revolutionaries have set up their new system then try to change the system they've put together. There's a nice twist at the end which I'll leave you to read.

The whole was, to me, very pleasing, once I accustomed myself to the style used by Maloney. My only regret is that I feel sure some readers would not take kindly to it; would find the tale less than enjoyable because of that dead-pan straight-man effect. Personally, I support it as not only readable but clever writing.

The next four pages are taken up with a three-page article on George Turner, well and sympathetically written, and informative.

After that we come to another work by a female writer, Dianne Speter: Do We Love? about a device which will tell each member of a couple whether the other has true affection for the partner. (Surely I remember a paperback book on a similar theme? Was it 'The Climacticon'? Or a title like that?) Anyway, in four-and-a-third pages this author spells out the distress, even fear, that such a device could cause, the reaction to the news given by the device, the ultimate disappointment and unhappiness. Very nicely, tastefully, expressed. And the author's lack of faith in technological items is shown clearly by the final appearance of something like one of those recall notices we see today: the manufacturer admitted the gadget had some built-in error.

I have a wish to express the slightest cavilling at the ending. The part immediately prior to the conclusion is nicely, though briefly, drawn out to tell of the couple separating after they get the news from the machine, but the very end is rather sudden and terse. I can imagine the author felt that was the way to do it and I bow to her opinion; I feel it could have been more fully developed and expressed.

Now for a writer with a name gender-strange to me: Jai Russell, who has provided Matter of Mind, a somewhat spooky psychiatric-medical tale. This is based on the idea that many people have at times, of being followed. The central character (Paul, age not given, but we can infer late twenties) has suffered that for many years, but in a worse form: he keeps feeling someone tapping him on the shoulder. He has gone to meditation therapy to have this hallucination treated. But that hasn't worked, and he has finally felt some growth coming up in his shoulder, where he has

for years felt that tap-on-the-shoulder, so he finally turned to orthodox medicine. The doctor, of course, ordered him in for the usual treatments, and in the course of that little dialogue the reader is given clues to what happens on the last page.

Our local champion, George Turner, fills the last slot with I Still Call Australia Home. A nice title, and fitting for a tale about a long-term exploration ship returning to this our land. This has, of course, been done before, and in fact Turner has done it himself; see Shut the Door When You Go Out, in A Pursuit of Miracles, although that had a somewhat different slant towards a different conclusion. Here, in just over thirteen pages Turner does excellent coverage of some background, the contact between the contact-person sent down by the returning crew and those-who-stayed-at-home, and the problems presented by a several centuries gap. Yes, Turner's ship has a sub-light velocity, and therefore the thirty-year voyage by ship time has allowed six centuries to elapse back home.

One distinct fascination in this is Turner's convincing shift of English language through the six hundred years. It's believable, but not if society and technology continues as at present, because we have so many media influences which are tending to stabilise language shift. However, if our present system of civilisation were to topple (as Turner writes into his tale) the media-control of language would disappear and English could change as much as it has since Chaucer's time.

There is also some well-developed and fascinating disagreement between the locals and the returnees: they aren't wanted by those locals, because society has changed so much.

Well, that's where I take a different line of thought. It's long been obvious that Turner believes we can't go on as we have for the last couple of hundred years, and we must either stuff the technological genie we think we've tamed back into the bottle or he'll turn on us and do untold damage. Maybe so. I prefer to believe we can avoid digging a grave for our own civilisation (with at least backhoes and bulldozers, of course, not picks and shovels) by sensible and suitable applications of technology. I am optimistic about the future centuries I won't see, and I dislike pessimism such as I read in Turner et al.

But that is a minor, personal criticism, and I beg you to disregard it when we look, I would hope together, at this item from Turner's output.

There's no doubt at all that this is a fine piece of story-telling writing. The whole, and the details, are constructed in a very craftsmanlike manner. Let me refer you to the opening: he begins with a page-and-a-half of background, written simply and descriptively, almost as if it were a newspaper article, just informing the reader of the SMH (or the Age) that the ship was back. At the end of that section the description breaks with a short action-statement which captures the reader before he starts to 'ho-hum' and lose interest.

Then there is some action among the locals for just over a page, followed by sections in which language confusion has to be

straightened out, confrontation between the person from the ship and a scholar, who is able to explain what has happened, and finally resolution by the ship being told to pack up and go away.

In addition to it being a well-told tale, there are nice bits of word-usage. I quote from about a page before the end:

> 'Anger she could have borne but he was reasonable - as a stone wall is reasonable and unbreachable.'

Finally, I must praise the inevitable frustration of the conclusion. There is extensive and quite rational, logical, pleading by the envoy from the ship, but it's clear quite early that the locals can't *possibly* let them come down to settle for equally rational, logical, reasons.

I hope I haven't given away too much of that one! It's very worth reading; I may not agree with Turner's futures, but I will defend to the death his right, as a writer, to present them if he can continue to turn out this quality of prose.

Finally, there's a short article on an unknown author (*definitely* a spoof) and some note-paragraphs on the content's authors, then some unused pages (advertising and stuff, three blank).

Well, now to overall impressions.

First, as hinted earlier, applause to the editors for taking up this task. It's long been needed, and I hope it continues.

Second, also applause for the general quality of contents. I have checked my applause meter (heavily biased by personal taste), and it says three very good, one good!, one good, two good-but-slightly-flawed, and one I didn't like. The editors must have worked hard for that, first time round; I wonder how much they had to stand over and browbeat the authors to get what they want? And how many they already have for the second issue?

However, I do believe some extensive development is needed in many ways. There's the frequency: I really feel a quarterly is less likely to attract and hold a faithful market than a monthly, but of course there's the problem of getting enough to fill more frequent issues. There's the size; it really should be twice as big, at least, but there's the same problem as above. Related to that, they really should have some longer items, sometimes, a novel or novella. And there's the price; let's hope they find both the supply of material and the markets are big enough to justify a lower unit (ie. per page) price. It's terrible to have to dwell on those sordid commercial factors, but that's life!

I will conclude by succumbing to a second temptation, to admit my knowledge that my remarks have stung writers before and may again. I don't apologise for my comments, as with the red ink I spill over my students' assignments I wish to be helpful. Indeed, the more I read of others' work the more I sense the inadequacy of my own attempts. Reading Pryor and Turner fills me with what I can only term humble jealousy.

Ron Ward.

MORE ABOUT ROBOTS

On considering early robot stories, up to 1938, the most remarkable point is that there are so few of them.

Memories of extensive reading of the SF magazines of the 1930s suggest that robots were there in force, if not in plague numbers. Yet the list I have compiled is quite short. There were a few more in books, and it may be true as memory suggests that they were common in old juvenile literature and early comics.

As a personal recollection, where I first encountered robots was in The War of the Planets, a serial running in the boys' weekly The Champion some time about 1933. The contending sides living on (I think) Mars and Venus were white-robed humans facing beetle-men. But the beetle-men had some robot helpers as shock troops.

It is possible to find stories about mechanical men, as they were generally called before the present term took on in the 1920s, occasionally from early in the last century. And from the first, besides strictly mechanical devices mimicking human form and function there is a tradition of about the same age of synthetic people brewed or cultivated rather than constructed.

Preceding and inspiring the fictional mechanical people came actual mechanical showpieces: the automata made around the beginning of the 19th century in Europe. A bird that flapped wings and sang, a duck that quacked and ate grain, and so on. Finally a flute-playing dummy and the more notorious Maelzel's chess-player. These were all display pieces that did not move from the spot where they were set up, walking being far too difficult. But they suggested more advanced mechanical pseud - people. The earliest in fiction seem to be in E.T.A. Hoffmann's stories Automata (1814) and The Sandman (1816) which are still spectacular toys only.

As for androids, there had been rumors and suggestions of experiments by alchemists, and tales involving magical creations such as the Golem. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein has the first known synthetic man, though as he was assembled from parts of casualties which is not quite the idea this may be disputed. Possibly the first

true android in fiction was Alraune by H. H. Ewers in 1911, though not available in English till 1929. Edgar Rice Burroughs introduced them in The Monster Men in 1913, developing the idea in detail a generation later in Synthetic Men of Mars in 1939. Wells' The Island of Dr. Moreau introduced another related concept in artificial modification of an existing organism. However, androids were much less popular than mechanical robots and these have provided most of the points worth discussing.

It should be remembered however that the categories are often confused. The terms were sometimes used ambiguously or inappropriately: Capek's Robots are actually organic, and what van Vogt calls robots in the Mixed Men stories are not only organic but obviously human. Robots were sometimes made to simulate people so closely as to be hard to recognise.

Then, too, early stories often have manlike devices which carry out complex programmed tasks without intelligence, or with restricted ability to adapt to a situation. There are mindless robot servants in The Coming Race by Lord Lytton (1871), robot nurses in a creche in A Story of the Days to Come by Wells (1899), a mobile dummy in The Dancing Partner by Jerome K. Jerome (1893) and many examples well into the time of science fiction proper.

Thus in The Threat of the Robot by David H. Keller (Science Wonder June 1929) there are programmed or remote controlled robots used for such purposes as playing football and directing traffic. A proposal to put large numbers of them to repetitive manual work in industry is frustrated, but no doubt only temporarily.

Remote control is an evasion sometimes used. In To the Moon by Proxy by J. Schlossel (Amazing Oct 1928) a manlike device controlled from Earth is used to get round the problem of the hazards of space flight to man. In A Menace in Miniature by Raymond Z. Gallun (Astounding Oct 1937) very small mechanical proxies are used by remote control for fine detail work. When space travellers are threatened by microscopic aliens such a device

is used to build a similar one an order of magnitude smaller and the process repeated to bring the operator down to the size of the enemy. In The Robot and the Lady by Manly Wade Wellman (Thrilling Wonder Oct 1938) two people meet and discover both are using remote-controlled simulations to give a better impression in person.

Another side issue was the idea of a mechanical body as a prosthetic device for an immobilised person, reduced ultimately to a disembodied brain. Stories such as The Machine-Man of Ardathia by Francis Flagg (Amazing Nov 1927) showed the human race in future ages degenerating physically and relying on mechanical aids increasingly. In The Moon Era by Jack Williamson (Wonder Feb 1932) an extraterrestrial race appears, reduced to brains in metal bodies. This thought is developed in Neil R. Jones' series about the roving Zoromes, spacefarers who include brains recruited from various species in their standard cubical, four-legged, four-tentacled bodies. Perhaps the first example was The Man with the Strange Head by Miles J. Breuer (Amazing Jan 1927).

It should have been obvious from the beginning that the basic problem was to create a conscious, thinking machine. Making it mobile and of approximate human shape was only optional. Most of the literature is found after calculating machines of some complexity had been developed and machine intelligence began to seem a reasonable prospect. So there is a considerable number of computer stories from the late 1940s onward. But there were also some early speculations.

In The Machine Stops by E. M. Forster (1909) a future world order has an unseen and anonymous Machine controlling everything. When it stops functioning -- no doubt from lack of maintenance by the decadent population -- the civilisation collapses. This is really an extension of the common fear that complex urban culture would fail under stress and barbarism recur, though usually it was thought that the strains imposed by major global warfare would cause the collapse.

The Machine by John W. Campbell (Astounding Feb 1935)

shows such a collapse in a future world. But here there is a single guiding intelligence, The Machine, which had originated on another world and come to Earth, taking control long before. It deliberately withdraws because it sees a world grown helplessly dependent on it, just as its original makers did. Man will have to take responsibility for his own needs, at cost. But this does not ultimately solve the problem, since after all when a new technological civilisation develops it is likely to make the same mistake again of its own accord.

There are other examples of a future world dominated by a central Brain. One is The Master of the Brain by Laurence Manning (Wonder Apr 1933), second in the Man Who Awoke series where by suspended animation a 20th century man sees future worlds developed along different lines. In Paradise and Iron by Williamson and Breuer (Amazing Quarterly Summer 1930) there is not a world but an isolated utopia getting into trouble by over-machanisation when its centrally controlled mechanisms revolt. In The Robot Technocrat by Nat Schachner (Wonder Mch 1933) a mechanical brain is developed to examine data on the national (by implication world) situation and advise on policy for the government, but there seems no danger at the time of it taking control directly.

All these aspects of the matter are side issues. The main concern is the possible development of the true robot: a mobile, independent equivalent of a living being, conscious, intelligent and having volition. Once such a thing exists, why should it act as we want it to?

Moxon's Master by Ambrose Beirce (1893) is not yet a true robot, it is apparently not mobile and is intended for only one function, playing chess. But it is intelligent, conscious, and a bad loser.

In A Round Trip to the Year 2000 by William Wallace Cook (1903) intelligent mechanical servants, called Muglugs (well, they had to be called something...) become aware of the social situation and dissatisfied with their position, logically revolting. Since this is the most obvious direction for robot thinking to take it is one

of the most frequent predictions.

RUR by Karel Capek (1923) is the play responsible for the actual word Robot, but its Robots are actually androids. After exterminating the human race they make the remarkable discovery that they are able to reproduce by the traditional method. It is, alas, a rather bad play, and the awkward English translation makes it hard to stage. Perhaps it was better in Czech. Nevertheless, it made the idea of synthetic people widely known and provided a useful word.

In The Metal Giants by Edmond Hamilton (Weird Tales Dec 1926) a static brain is first created, but it is provided with hands and builds 300-foot humanoid radio-controlled automata with which to pulverise humanity and take over the world.

Metropolis had its main impact as a film spectacle and is still being shown, but the novelisation by Thea von Harbou (1927) was also popular. It has a definitely mechanical robot, though it is then redesigned to simulate a woman. It made Robot the standard term henceforth. This robot though lifelike does not assert its own personality but merely performs as instructed. The larger issue is the proposal to replace human workers with robot slaves on a mass scale.

The Comet Doom by Edmond Hamilton introduces the humanoid but extra-terrestrial robot invading Earth. No doubt they were originally designed by a naturally evolved race, but they have a civilisation of their own. (Amazing Jan 1928).

The Metal Horde by John W. Campbell (Amazing Apr 1930) has a more sophisticated version of the robot invader. A mechanical brain from the system of Sirius attacks Earth with subservient fighting machines.

The Infinite Brain by John C. Campbell (Science Wonder Stories May 1930) is rare among robot stories in giving considerable space to discussing how a thinking device might work, though its suggestions do not seem very helpful. The experimenter constructs a Brain which

he provides with recordings of his own knowledge and personality to continue after his death. With human assistance a far more advanced Brain is built, which proves to be anti-social and after preparation launches an attack on the existing order. Incidentally there appears some doubt about the name of this obscure author: indexes take him to be the same as John Scott Campbell, a name signed to four other stories.

Men of Steel by the Australian-born Desmond Hall under the name Ainslee Jenkins (Weird Tales Dec 1930) is written as a tale of horror with a demented experimenter creating monsters and terrorising innocent bystanders. But the monsters are mechanical robots, though they need to be animated with the extracted life force or personality of a murdered person.

The Doom from Planet 4 by Jack Williamson (Astounding July 1931) has invading Martian machines attempting to establish a base on Earth. They are not of human shape but have oblong box bodies with suitable appendages.

Automaton by Abner J. Gelula (Amazing Nov 1931) is I think the first story to consider how a robot might be accepted as an independent being living on its own merits in a human society. It is not ultimately a success, but the idea is raised.

In The Reign of the Robots by Edmond Hamilton (Wonder Dec 1931) a time traveller visits a future where robots dominate the world and humans live a precarious existence. Fortunately it proves to be an elaborate hoax.

Vandals of the Void by the Australian J. M. Walsh (Wonder Quarterly Summer 1931) is an example of many stories in which robots are merely mentioned in passing as an element of a future culture. Here they are the bulk of the unskilled work force on Mars.

In The Lost Machine by John B. Harris (Amazing Apr 1932), an early story by the variously-styled author best known as John Wyndham, a Martian intelligent machine is stranded on Earth and destroys itself for inscrutable reasons. This is obscurely connected with the novel

Stowaway to Mars (1935) in which this episode is mentioned but not explained since Mars does not seem interested in contacting Earth.

Stowaway to Mars began as a newspaper serial, and was also serialised later as The Space Machine, but the first book version by Newnes 1936 bears the idiotic title Planet Plane. Be this as it may, it is well up with the best of mid-thirties SF. A 21st Century private flight to Mars finds the Lowellian world of deserts, canals, not quite breathable air, and a dying human civilisation. The machines -- never called robots -- are deliberately nonhuman in form, oblong boxes with legs and tentacles, and live side by side with the humans they are designed to outlive. Though there are also some dropout machines doing their own thing in desert communes. It is a book full of undeveloped ideas and loose ends and though it had one short sequel, Sleepers of Mars (Tales of Wonder no. 2, 1938) Harris never wrote the book he clearly meant to follow it.

In The Last Evolution by John W. Campbell (Amazing Aug 1932) by 2500 intelligent machines handle most of the world's work and, although Campbell glosses over it, the human race is becoming uselessly decadent with some exceptions. A superior insect-like species from some remote world come to annex the planets and the machines fight them off. But in the process they redesign successively more advanced thinking devices going far beyond human understanding.

The Call of the Mech-Men by Laurence Manning (Wonder Nov 1933) has a colony of alien robots stranded long past on Earth surviving in an Arctic retreat with the prospect of rescue -- bad news for us, since these robots have no time for organic life. Their presumed creators are long forgotten and man is at best a nuisance to them.

The Robot Rebellion (Blue Book May 1934) is a misleading title. The setting is a future when robot workers are commonplace, but here they appear only as assistants in a human conspiracy.

In Rex by Harl Vincent (Astounding June 1934) there are servile robots well established in 23rd Century America, a totally urbanised culture of eleven sealed cities, isolated from the rest of the world where conditions are unknown. The super-robot Rex accidentally develops an independent, assertive personality and after preparation takes over as absolute ruler, putting the humans to (horrors) work under robot supervision and planning further changes. But developing a method of experiencing human emotions, he suicides in an excess of despair.

Cosmos, a round-robin collaboration by seventeen authors, was issued part by part as a supplement to the first significant amateur journal of SF, Fantasy Magazine, from July 1933 to Jan 1935. Ralph Milne Farley, David H. Keller, Arthur J. Burks, Bob Olsen, Francis Flagg, John W. Campbell, Otis Adelbert Kline, E. Hoffman Price, Abner J. Gelula, A. Merritt, J. Harvey Haggard, E. E. Smith, P. Schuyler Miller, Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, Eando Binder and Edmond Hamilton -- and when one contribution failed to arrive by his deadline Raymond A. Palmer hastily whipped up a substitute chapter under the alias Rae Winters. Working without an outline, each of this formidable band of improvisers took the situation given by the last contributor in whatever direction suggested itself. It was natural for robots to be introduced and though playing a major role in some chapters they were written out by Merritt and given a brief encore by Smith.

Cosmos can have had only a few hundred readers, how few cannot at this point be established. But they included most of the people of any influence in science fiction -- all or most editors, agents and authors, every one watching some notable talents grapple with an appalling task, and all for love of science fiction, no one being paid a cent. So the series (we really can't call it a single work) had a strong influence. And Merritt's and Smith's chapters were printed without comment as short stories in Thrilling Wonder, as Rhythm of the Spheres (Oct 1936) and Robot Nemesis (June 1939) respectively.

More about Robots

In Rhythm of the Spheres a future Earth still has separate political entities but they are much the same, all authoritarian, over-regulated, and much under the influence of the robots that have become accepted as part of the natural order. The recluse Narodny, a universal genius of great resource, considers the robot problem and devises a means of deactivating them all at a stroke.

In Robot Nemesis a small minority of them who accidentally survived the extermination plan an unsuccessful coup. These robots are seen as essentially out of sympathy with man, having no interest in human needs.

Two stories by Campbell under the name Don A. Stuart visualising remote future times had profound influence on many writers. They were Twilight (Astounding Nov 1934) and Night (Oct 1935). In Twilight, after seven million years an advanced civilised world has become static, continuing with everything efficiently managed by the automatic machines. Not manlike robots. There is artificial intelligence directed to practical ends without initiative or originality. It is clear that man will decline and pass eventually.

In Night a time traveller sees the time when the Sun, all the stars indeed, are cold. Life is represented still by the machines that have survived man by billions of years.

In The Robot Aliens by Eando Binder (Wonder Feb 1935) a shipload of vaguely humanoid shaped robots land on Earth with nothing but innocent curiosity. But they are taken as invaders and are attacked and repelled by the natives.

In The Ideal by Stanley G. Weinbaum (Wonder Sep 1935) there is some discussion of how robots should operate, and a proposal is made for a mechanical tiger, a predatory machine that would refuel itself forcibly by attacking motor vehicles. It is not in fact built but inspired an interesting cover painting by Paul.

The first appearance of the word Android was in The Cometeers by Jack Williamson (Astounding May-Aug 1936).

They are not established in the future interplanetary civilisation of the novel, but a villainous character is discovered to be a synthetic man not readily distinguished from the natural product. The sequel One against the Legion (Apr-June 1939) introduces another specimen, also reprehensible.

The Perfect Creature by John Beynon, another face of John Wyndham, (Tales of Wonder no. 1, 1937) was a synthetic organic being, but scarcely an android. Its creator redesigned the human structure with improvements that resulted in a monster.

Two quite different kinds of robot appeared in the Sep 1938 Astounding. In Treasure Asteroid by Manly Wade Wellman a roughly man-shaped colossus is left as a guard to deal with unwanted visitors to the worldlet of the title. It is powered by sunlight -- incidentally power supply is often taken as read in these stories -- and its intelligence is probably low.

On the other hand in Robots' Return by Robert Moore Williams there is a world of manlike robots on a remote planet, originally created by man though they do not know it. An expedition visits Earth, now uninhabited, and learns that this was their own world of origin.

Orestes Revolts by Eando Binder (Astounding Oct 1938) is a trivial story of a tinkerer building an experimental mechanical man. It does not appear intelligent.

The Time Trap by Henry Kuttner (Marvel Science Stories Nov 1938) is noteworthy as one of the several stories with liberal dollops of what passed for erotic action in those days which this magazine presented in a few issues. Among various wonders seen in several eras the villain of the piece employs robots as police. They seem to have little independence and appear only briefly. Still another example of their use as a stock element.

In The Cosmic Hiss by Edmond Hamilton (Thrilling Wonder Dec 1938) Extraterrestrials attempt to invade Earth by establishing radio contact and sending directions for building a robot which will act for them. This is a variant of an idea Hamilton and others had used be-

fore this. In two stories, Hamilton's Monsters of Mars (Astounding Apr 1931) and Edwin K. Sloat's World Without Name (Wonder Mch 1931) the experimenters on Earth picking up messages were induced to build matter transmitters.

Helen O'Loy by Lester del Rey (Astounding Dec 1938) was considered a radical departure at the time. Helen was a robot, reference to parts showing that her intelligence was electronic (though that word was not yet current); but she was made to simulate a human being closely enough to pass as one. Not easy to accept, then or now. But the story considered an artificial being as a person, and suggested awkward questions.

None of these treatments come to grips with the serious issues that would arise if robots were to be developed. If a synthetic entity is brought into existence with consciousness, intelligence and volition then it is by definition a person, equivalent to human. Do we allow it human rights? If not, why not? How can we relate to it? As equals? As master to servant? Why should it take a subordinate role? What are its needs and how are they to be supplied? Do we employ it and pay it to do a job?

Have we not enough trouble coping with existing problems without this can of worms? What business do we have creating a radically new kind of intelligent life when we have so little understanding of ourselves?

Clearly ideas about robots were emerging in the science fiction community in 1938 leading to the appearance of such significant stories as Robots' Return, Helen O'Loy and I, Robot so close together. 1939 also brought After World's End by Jack Williamson, Robot A-1 by Oscar J. Friend and Rust by Joseph E. Kelleam, and Asimov took up the subject in 1940. There were many later writings, but thinking has not really advanced much since then. This survey was intended only to look briefly at some of the background to I, Robot and suggest ideas for closer study.

-- G.S.

Obituary

DONALD ALLEN WOLLHEIM, 1 Oct 1914-1 Nov 1990

Amateur, author, editor, anthologist Donald A. Wollheim died in New York on 1 Nov.

Not being paid for his first published story, The Man from Ariel in Wonder Stories Jan 1934, prompted him to take an active part in the movement, first extracting payment for himself and several other writers, continuing a prominent figure in prewar amateur circles. He named the New York Futurian group giving the field such talents as Asimov, Blish, Kornbluth, Pohl, Lowndes and Knight. He was one of the originators of the idea of large scale gatherings quaintly dubbed Conventions, and he organised the Fantasy Amateur Press Association.

He wrote over forty short stories under various names (Martin Pearson, Millard Verne Gordon, David Grinnell etc) as well as many collaborations with others, nine novels. But his main role was as editor.

His first two short-lived magazines, Stirring Science Stories and Cosmic Stories in 1941, were so under-financed that most material was not paid for, reversing his early experience, and they lasted only three and four issues: early works of important writers give them some interest. A more successful venture was the Avon Fantasy Reader, an irregular "periodical anthology" marketed as a paperback series and the earliest such, with 23 issues under variant titles from 1947 to 1953. He also edited for the Avon firm several paperback collections including The Girl with the Hungry Eyes, believed the earliest original SF anthology, and two unsuccessful magazines, Out of This World Adventures (remembered with horror as the magazine with a color comic insert) with two issues in 1950, and Ten Story Fantasy (actually containing 13 stories) one issue in 1951.

But in the mean time he had edited a collection of great significance: The Pocket Book of Science Fiction (Pocket Books 1943.) This was not only the first book to have the words "science fiction" in its title, it was the first avowed science fiction collection and the first appearence of the term in a book -- or indeed in print anywhere outside the regular magazines and amateur journals. Another innovative volume he put together was The Portable

Donald A. Wollheim

Novels of Science (Viking 1945), an omnibus of four by Wells, Stapledon, Lovecraft and Taine.

He was science fiction editor of Ace Books for 20 years, 1952 to 1972, responsible for a staggering array of notable books, bringing to light many overlooked early works, leading the revival of interest in Edgar Rice Burroughs and such lesser lights as Ray Cummings as well as establishing many new writers and consolidating others. Then he went on to create his own imprint DAW Books, continuing to the present with a balanced selection of books, often outstanding.

One of the great pioneers, few can have done as much for science fiction.

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS
No. 113, Dec 1990

ISSN 0156-6342

Issued irregularly for members of the Australian Science Fiction Association

GPO Box 4440, Sydney 2001. Graham Stone, Secretary
Annual subscription $10.00