
Subject: Stories about intelligent machines
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From: eyal%wisdom.BITNET@Berkeley (Eyal mozes)

> I heard from a friend about a movie or TV version of "The
> Adolescence of P1". Does anyone know anything about it? The book
> was about a system cracking program which gets loose in the net and
> eventually attains consciousness. It was unusually accurate for
> this kind of thing, unlike, say, "Wargames".

"The Adolescence of P-1" is certainly NOT "unusually realistic". It is devoid of any understanding of Artificial Intelligence, and presents a wildly impossible story. Thomas Ryan obviously takes the "brute force" approach to AI - the view that very large amounts of memory and computational power are a sufficient condition for the creation of intelligence. This view became obsolete long before the story was written. Of course, it is better than "Wargames"; that's not saying much.

If you want a story about a machine which gets out of the control of its creator and eventually attains consciousness, and if you want that story to be realistic, even didactic, and at the same time an interesting, suspenseful story, then obviously the book for you is James P. Hogan's "The Two Faces of Tomorrow" (Byte's special issue on Artificial Intelligence, vol. 6 no. 9 september 1981, contained an article called "Science Fiction's Intelligent Computers", which was devoted mainly to a review of "The Adolescence of P-1" and "The Two Faces of Tomorrow").

Another, more recent novel about machines attaining consciousness, which is more speculative but still very realistic, is Hogan's most recent novel (as far as I know; for someone who wants to keep up with what's going on in SF, living in Israel can be VERY frustrating) and,

to date, his best: "Code of the Life Maker".

----- Minor Spoiler Follows (only spoils first 15 pages) -----

In "Code of the Life Maker", Hogan takes the "evolutionary" approach to AI. The story starts with an automated robot-factory spaceship with bugs in its software (the bugs were caused by radiation from a nearby supernova) landing on Titan about a million years ago. The defects in the robots it makes set in motion a Darwinian evolutionary process (there is a very convincing, detailed explanation of how this happens) which finally results in the emergence of intelligence.

----- End Of Spoiler -----

Several contributors to SF-Lovers Digest gave very high (and justified) praise to Forward's "Dragon's Egg" for its hard-core science. "Code of the Life Maker" also deals with the subject of humanity's encounter with a different form of life, and is just as scientifically interesting; unlike Forward's book, however, it has a plot - a very ingenious and suspenseful one - and deals with important philosophic issues. (It also has some very childish political views, but these play such a minor part that they don't detract from the book at all).

The one trouble with "Code of the Life Maker" is that, like all other books by Hogan (or Forward), it doesn't have a real protagonist. However, in the character which comes closest to being one, Karl Zambendorf, we can find, for the first time in Hogan's novels, a good, convincing, interesting character. Let us all hope that it's not the last time.

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