

AGE DIVERSITY IN *ASIMOV'S*

The eclectic mix we look for in our monthly magazine means that our stories cover many aspects of the human condition. Stories can be set anywhere and anytime. They can be told via hard SF or social science SF, fantasy or horror, slipstream or magical realism. They can be in first, second, or third person; present, past, or future (in very short bursts) tense; and roundabout or linear in their approach. The problems the characters face may be universal, but the plots can be about deep space or time travel, alternate history or robots, generation ships or FTL or aliens or the mysteries of our ordinary everyday world, with permutations that combine multiple themes. Characters can come from any background known, or yet unknown, to us. Their gender and sexual orientations can be fluid or not. And, from childhood to life-extension, stories can examine all the ages of a human lifetime.

Some people argue that they prefer a theme anthology or a novel to an issue of a magazine because they want to know what they are reading up front. Every story in a steampunk anthology will be steampunk. A giant fantasy novel promises fantasy throughout. Our tastes vary. A magazine like *Asimov's* will contain some stories and themes and characters that won't appeal to everyone. Fortunately, there are thousands of readers who are delighted by our mix—yet I never expect that each of you will be pleased by all my selections all the time.

I'm used to being told that the engineering in one story is too realistic or the fantasy in another too pervasive. The critic will avow that the tale would have been better off in *Analog* or *F&SF*. On rarer occasions, I have been criticized for featuring tales about children and young adults. The implication is that *Asimov's* is a magazine for adults, which means the tales should all be about adults as well. This last criticism has always been the one that most surprises me.

It's hard to imagine a magazine that purports to cover all the conditions of humanity not covering the early years every so often. Any reader of *Asimov's* has certainly experienced childhood and the 'tween years. Many of the issues that faced us then reverberate throughout our lives. With any luck, some of our readers picked up the magazine as precocious young adults. Perhaps a story about "A Letter From the Cleary's" (Connie Willis's July 1982 Nebula-Award winning short story) or a "Scout" (Will McIntosh, April/May 2014) was what first drew you to *Asimov's*.

It can be argued that there are two types of stories about young protagonists. One is really written for the adult who is looking back on those early years. It may take place from the youth's perspective, but there's a worldliness about the tale that can be fully appreciated by the mature reader. The other seems to be written specifically for the child or young adult. That sort of story often focuses on the youth's perspective. The reader is expected to figure out the denouement at roughly the same time that the protagonist catches onto it.

Critics may disagree with my distinctions, and I'm sure an attempt to define fiction for younger readers is probably as fraught as any attempt at defining science fiction. Still, the above is part of what goes into *my* thinking when I chose stories for the magazine. *Asimov's* is primarily aimed at adult readers, and when we publish tales about young adults or children, we mostly publish the first type of story.

Such tales are not new to this magazine. By the early nineties, we'd published enough stories to allow us to pull together three anthologies of stories for young readers—*Tales from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine: Short Stories for Young Adults* (Harcourt, 1986), *Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers: And Other Short*

*Stories from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (Random House Children's Books, 1990), and *The Lock Moose Monster: More Stories from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (Delacorte, 1993). I'm sure that we could create several excellent new books from the material we've accumulated over the intervening years.

The stories in these anthologies were almost all written with the adult audience in mind. Indeed, Lawrence Watt-Evans tale about the all-night diner won the 1988 Hugo award for best short story. Yet, they appealed to kids, too. At the same time, while critics like Joel Stein and Ruth Graham believe that adults should be shamed for reading works that are written for young people, I've also enjoyed many works that fall into the second category. I found the Harry Potter series a fun read. I've engaged in a passionate conversation about the ethical arc of the Hunger Games with a professor of moral and social philosophy. I highly recommend Rachel Stead's Newbery medal-winning novel, *When You Reach Me*, which I discovered on my sixth grader's summer reading list a couple of years ago. That young people will learn much about the world from reading adult literature does not mean that adults can't find pleasure and illumination in works that were primarily written for the young.

I mentioned the topic of this editorial to Dominica Phetteplace a while ago. You'll find Dominica's own story about a young adult on page 46. The author responded, "Age diversity is important. Young people, especially young women, are often marginalized and diminished in our society. I'm proud to be a part of this magazine!" I agree. This is a magazine that is comprised of tales about the many issues that define our humanity (or an alien's alienness). Humanity includes young women, young men, and little children. As they have in the past, many *Asimov's* tales will continue to do so as well.