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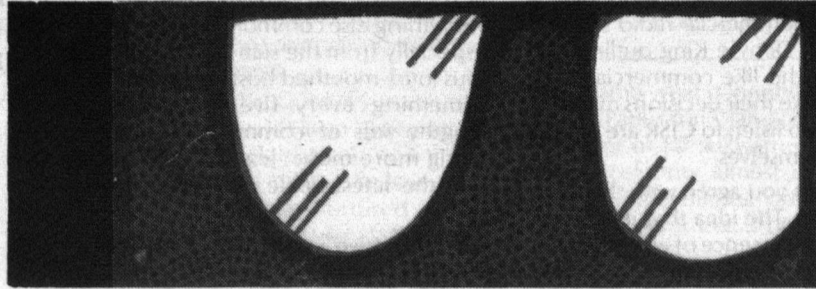
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## Hardwired Angel: good but unpolished ideas

review by Elaine Ostry

*Hardwired Angel* was a book written in three days and unfortunately this haste is obvious. The novel was written by the editors of *The Bullet*, Nora Abercrombie and Candace Jane Dorsey, and won the ninth annual Pulp Press Three Day Novel Contest.

The ideas of the book are very interesting, and the plot and characters hold the reader's attention. However, the novel sets up more questions than it can answer, and the movement of the plot as well as the motivation of the characters is often vague.

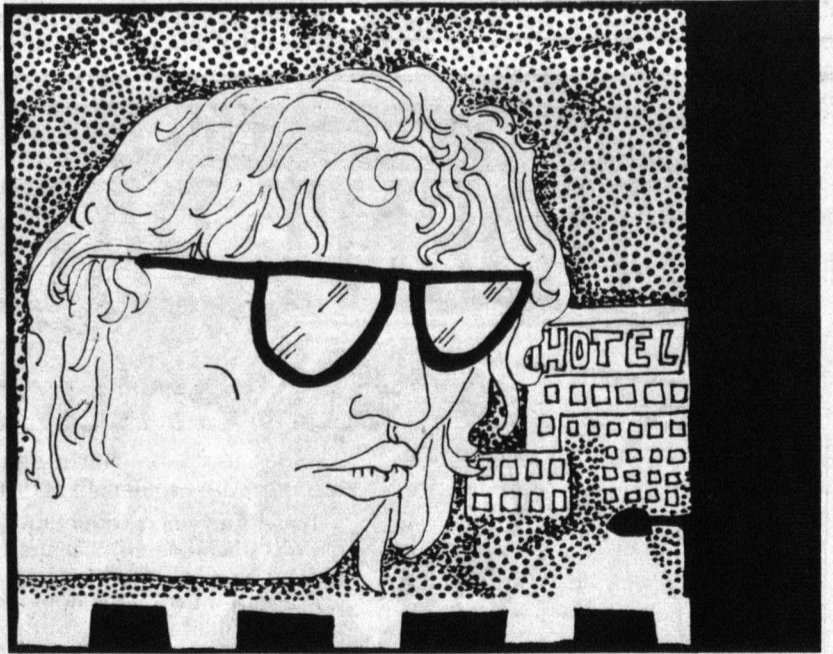


*Hardwired Angel* was a book written in three days, and unfortunately, this haste is obvious. The ideas of the book are very interesting, and the plot and characters hold the reader's attention. However, the book sets up more questions than it can answer and the movement of the plot as well as the motivation of the characters is often vague.

*Hardwired Angel* is the story of Anna, a computer genius who designed, at age fourteen, a bionic microchip that revolutionized the computer world. The book is set in the near future, when Anna is seventeen, in-between discoveries and into a lot of drugs and illicit sex. Anna is pursued by the people in the company she once worked for because they want her to develop her bionic chip program for the military. However, she cannot avoid them and a good portion of the book portrays their confrontation.

The authors have alternated chapters pertaining to Anna's present life with those showing events from her past. This use of flashbacks is effective, because they give needed background information about the heroine. Also effective is the use of detail in the descriptions, particularly that of the

Lloydminster bus station: "The thick white cup was rimmed with cracked brown line so worn it seemed more like grime than decoration." These details create good images of atmosphere and place, and it is fun to read something set in Edmonton ("...sitting in a booth in the Silk Hat on Jasper Avenue").



This book also has a good, offbeat sense of humour.

However, every aspect of the book is underdeveloped. First of all, the narrative voice is uncertain. The book begins with Anna's Aunt Krista describing the girl. Then, in the second chapter, Anna takes over and the story continues in the third person omniscient, revealing Anna's thoughts and feelings that Aunt Krista would not have known. Aunt Krista herself is described in the third person, and does not surface as a narrator until the last chapter.

Secondly, the motivation of the central character is unclear. Why had she gone through such trouble when she was fourteen to hide her past and true identity, even using the name Angel rather than her

own? How was she to know then the kind of trouble she would be in three years later?

And her refusal to use her program for the military is never explained. In all, there is little depth shown in her actions and convictions.

Anna/Angel seems too tough, too sure of herself to be real. The flashbacks in other events towards the end of the book hint at Anna's need for love and protection, but more of her thoughts on her childhood and relations with others need to be included and developed. The despair that leads her to

a destructive life of drugs and sex with strangers is not believable, and does not ultimately touch the reader.

The plot of the story

also seems faulty. Anna doesn't always act as smart as she is, as shown when she fails to recognize that Barry (the love interest) is familiar with the high computer technology (and therefore may be "one of them") although he recognizes her "Mannboard" computer, which has not yet been marketed.

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Also, Anna's inventions are only described in the most vague and general of terms, if they are described at all. The reader has no idea what "Machine Sex" is, nor how the bionic chip works. It is hard for a reader to be interested in something not adequately explained.

Certainly the ending of *Hardwired Angel* is happy: Anna manages to foil her enemies, she and Barry (who is really 'Dave') form both love and business partnerships, Anna suddenly (and painlessly) gives up drugs, and gets inspiration for a new discovery. However, the ending is also rather vague. The reader cannot tell for sure whether Anna's

new idea for the use of the bionic chip to replace dead brain cells has resulted in cures for her retarded brother or her comatose grandmother.

Altogether, *Hardwired Angel* has some very interesting ideas and a memorable heroine, but interest is not enough to make a really good novel. The book seems to be a series of notes for a larger, denser novel, one that would take longer than three days to write. Perhaps the authors should consider doing a rewrite that would develop the book's themes and characters further. Perhaps the length of the contest itself should be extended so that the participants would have the chance to write in more depth and detail. The novel is a complex literary form that deserves more than three days.