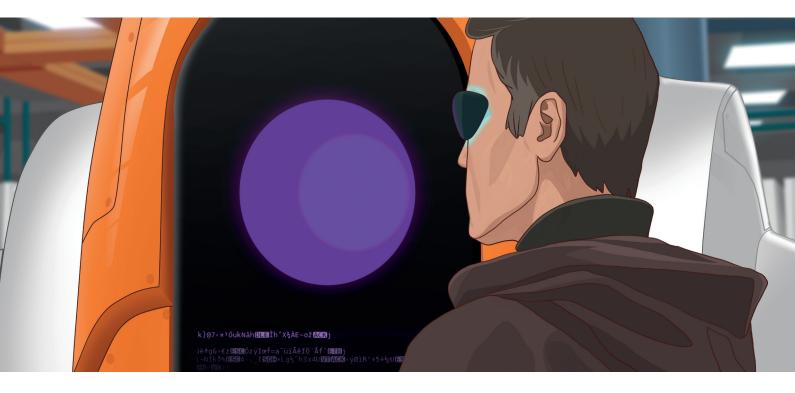
2038 A SMART PORT STORY: PART 2 A REVIEW

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So Part 2 of INFORM's ground-breaking Sci-Fi novella 2038: A Smart Port Story is here, and we're delighted once again to publish it exclusively. The review I wrote for Part 1 of 2038 last year proved to be one of our most popular downloads (along with the actual novella itself) and as I've had the fortune to review the second instalment, I can say with complete confidence that this next iteration is a far more multifaceted and extensive offering.

The first thing readers will note in Part 2 is the wonderful depth of characterization on display. Part 1 offered us some great insights; how the Port of Reykjavik has become a major transhipment hub for global trade passing over the recently developed Arctic passage (incidentally, this has begun to formulate already, with German port operator bremenports [sic] recently entering into a contract to develop a new facility in Iceland), how the future terminal will be deeply automated, and how despite this, the same old familiarities of the human condition are at play. It is on this note that, thematically at least, Part 2 begins.

As I stated in my review of Part 1, I never expected to find myself reviewing a piece of creative writing in my role as Editor with Port Technology, and a lovely experience it was, but now I can say that I never expected there to be such care, craft and attention paid to the world of 2038 and the characters therein when reviewing Part 2. The authors – Dr Eva Savelsberg and Matthew Wittemeier really have gone the extra mile in this regard. While one may think this novella is a simple piece of foresight into the industry, marking developments with a few metaphorical allusions to the present day, they may as well throw themselves into a great big bloody bin. Part 2 is a far more expansive piece of work than that. This is so much the case that when reading Part 2, I found myself identifying with the characters, even deeply empathising with them. Further still, I found myself appreciating that in the Smart Port world of 2038, the characters are conflicted with each other as well as with the broader systems around them as they strive to articulate their own perception of the

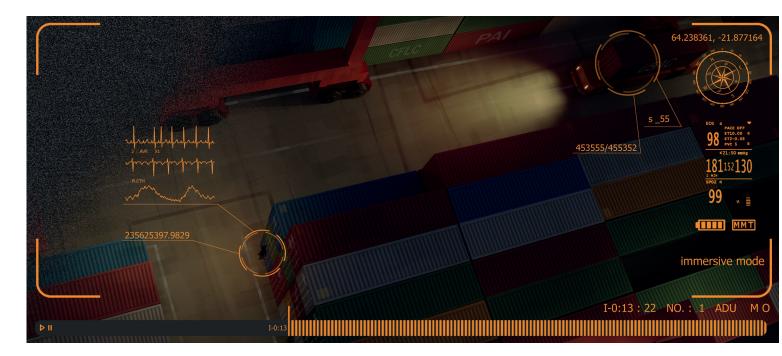
truth in a deeply complex situation. This is one of the pleasures in reading 2038, while the futuristic environment is faintly familiar yet simultaneously distant, the human stories are developed in such a manner that draws the reader into identifying with them via the realities of the human condition.

HUMANS & TECH

The rich characterization and deep, complex plot is of course buried in the broader theme of the story itself, which is humans and technology through the prism of the maritime container terminal. The issue of human-technology interaction isn't just a fundamental theme in maritime, it is arguably one of the biggest issues humanity faces, along with climate change and political imbalances.

The implementation of artificial intelligence has brought many promises in recent years, from the dystopian to the utopian. We've had repeated warnings from the great and good to prepare for major changes to our jobs and lifestyles. Some sound a cautious note (such as Bill

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Gates and Elon Musk), while others are full of hope (such as Google founder Sergey Brin), and some fall firmly in the middle (such as the late Dr Steven Hawking). The contemporary issue in which this is impacting the supply chain – and the wider world – the most is in automated vehicles. The occupation 'driver' remains one of the most common job roles in many first-world countries, and with the advent of automated trucking, many unions and political figures have sounded alarm bells regarding what their future holds.

One of the most utopian solutions to this is universal basic income (UBI), an effective 'robot tax' that redistributes profits made from automating processes back to those who lost out in the switch to artificial workers. This seems a dream for some, a utopian opportunity to be free from the demands of work, thereby freeing the individual to follow one's passions in life. The counter argument to this is that it sounds too good to be true, with detractors quoting the old adage, 'If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is'.

Ergo, the counter-argument focuses more on the human need for purpose and identity as acquired via work. Detractors further state that not all people are born with a deep creative desire, and would hence find such new found freedom bereft of the structure a career provides chaotic. This argument is the seedbed from which the 'Anti-Techs', the seditious anti-technology faction in 2038, have grown from. The Anti-Techs are another fantastic creation, representing the logical conclusion of artificial intelligence imple-

mented poorly, leaving disenfranchised workers with a sense of righteous indignation and a score to settle.

SOCIAL REALITIES

The authors of Part 2 have dealt with the issue of machines and tech in a highly balanced manner, entwined within a winding, engaging plot that develops throughout Part 2, the authors explore each side of the social divide with some dexterity. Such a dexterity thus allows the reasoning for character motivations to manifest organically, rather than it feeling forced with the authors coercing us to take a position on the issue of technology and human interaction. This harks back to the key theme again, and shows that despite this being a futuristic Sci-Fi novella, it is fundamentally a story about human beings. This underlying theme reaches through in the zenith of Part 2's prescience as the authors explore the one capacity that humans have that machines do not - creativity.

This stark distinction reminds us of one the great facets of ourselves as humans; that we have an unexplainable soulful magic about us that cannot be replicated in simple algorithms. This poignant message is embodied in the ever-likeable main character Douglas, whom the plot revolves around. Douglas carries a world-weary charm about him, he has the air of a 'seenit-all' cop without falling so far into cynicism that he becomes un-relatable. Given his age and his senior position, Douglas is clearly a product of an earlier time, and that earlier time is the time we inhabit

now, making it easy for the contemporary reader to understand Douglas's confusion and distaste towards the hyper-modern tech around him. He expresses this in refusing to follow protocols, by turning off his monitoring devices, and by relying on his instincts rather than pure data. When Douglas does all this, you find yourself supporting him in these efforts on principle alone, but when one factors in the plot details (which I won't give away here), it makes you support him all the more. Douglas is reminiscent of Dostoyevsky's painfully free notion of man, he who strives to show that men cannot be held to simple laws alone, that "men are still men, and not the keys of a piano".

CONCLUSION

A character such as Douglas emphasises the key questions we face here in 2019: What are humans in the face of technological advancements? How, where and why do we need to be mindful of our use of technology? Is technology something to advance human civilization, or are humans something to advance technological civilization? The answers to these questions are – to paraphrase Bob Dylan – "blowin' in the wind", yet they are questions we must address as we unleash incredibly powerful forces on the supply chain and each other.

Part 2 forms the second instalment of the 2038: A Smart Port Story trilogy, the concluding Part 3 will be released in time for the Smart Port Conference in Rotterdam in October, 2019.