

The bionic eye

BY F.A. ANVERY

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NCESSITY is the mother of invention, and much of science begins with speculation. The roots of many an amazing invention lay hidden in some fabled imagination, such as that of the flying carpets of Oriental potentates and in the seven-ringed cup of Jamshed. The prodigious idea of the bionic eye was, no doubt, born in America and, no wonder, for the American mind in our own age has come to be regarded as clear-sighted, forward-looking, optimistic, progressive and good. The reason for this may be that most Americans originate from somewhere else, except for the 'Injuns', of course.

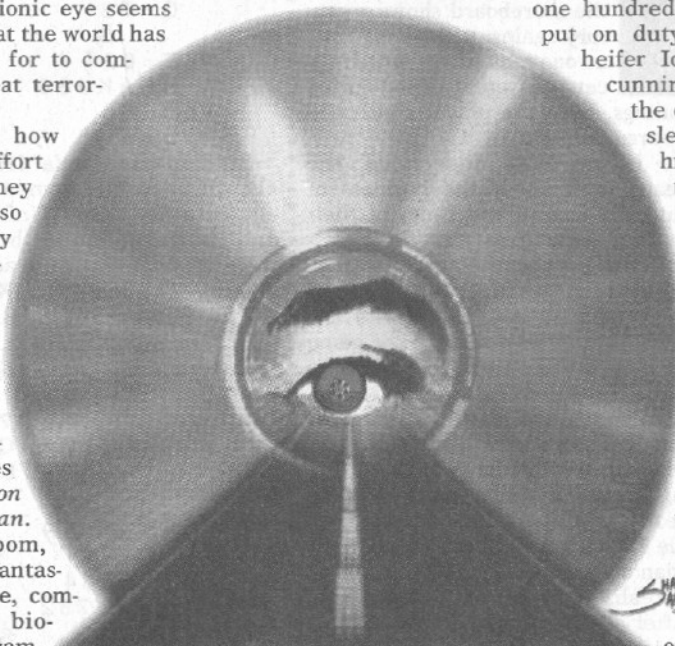
The bionic eye is one of the masterpieces of modern science fiction as the dream instrument for all those whose business it is to fight and eradicate felony. It has become an urgent necessity to keep demons of the underworld at bay. One, therefore, wonders why this highly ingenious, highly selectable

and much-wanted device has not yet materialized into three dimensions and gone on the production line. The idea of the bionic eye seems to be just what the world has been looking for to combat and defeat terrorism.

Imagine how much time, effort and money could be so effectively and productively saved by this fascinating idea of the bionic eye, if you still remember the popular TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Zap, zip, zoom, and lo, the fantastic bionic eye, combining the bio-ophthalmic camera, with reverted radar and converted lazarus, penetrates the hardest imaginable hindrances and spies out the cul-

prit standing there downcast, naked and unashamed of his loathsome inhumanity.

Liberty and progress have always needed vigilant eyes and the vigil for these basic



human rights has a long story. Close-circuit cameras and inter-playing mirrors in hyper-markets to prevent

shoplifting is a much later development. The need for a watchful eye has existed since the earliest days.

The idea of the need for the bionic eye can be traced back to the Greeks and to their mythology, which is even now used as a creative symbolic metaphor in literature. The fabulous Argus had one hundred eyes, and was put on duty to watch the heifer Io. But Mercury cunningly charmed the dutiful Argus to sleep and slew him. As a befitting punishment, Juno transformed Mercury into a peacock, imprinting the hundred eyes on this colourful bird's tail feathers.

Another such eyeful figure in classical mythology is that of Janus, who had faces on his front and back, with four eyes to look forward as well as backward. Janus was supposed to be the idol of all beginnings and

fresh ventures. In a way, I still remember Janus. As a working journalist some five decades ago, one of my duties was to, write a short, weekly column for the newspaper. The editor suggested the pen-name of Janus for me. I was a humble two-eyed mortal but, under the pen-name of Janus, I was rewarded or punished (which I did never know) with another couple of eyes in the shape of spectacles. I still use them, only the lenses have grown in girth to compensate for the growing weakness of my eyesight.

Coming back to the bionic eye, don't you think that it is now a most pressing need of the time? I can imagine that some backstage researchers must be burning much midnight oil on the project in some laboratory somewhere, and the time might not be far when the bionic eye would become available. So, until the time this useful device goes onto the production line, we might make some makeshift arrangements. How about keeping a national vigil? Let us keep our eyes wide open. Here, 28 crores (14,00,00,000 x 2) of wakeful eyes become a working force for the ultimate bionic eye!

Graham Bell did not invent the telephone: US

SA Tech Dawn 18.6.02

By Rory Carroll

ROME, June 17: Italy hailed the redress of a historic injustice on Sunday, after the US Congress recognised an impoverished Florentine immigrant as the inventor of the telephone rather than Alexander Graham Bell.

Historians and Italian-Americans won their battle to persuade Washington to recognise a little-known mechanical genius, Antonio Meucci, as a father of modern communications, 113 years after his death.

The vote by the House of Representatives prompted joyous claims in Meucci's homeland that finally Bell had been outed as a perfidious

Scot who found fortune and fame by taking over another man's work.

Calling the Italian's career extraordinary and tragic, the resolution said his "teletrofono", demonstrated in New York in 1860, made him the inventor of the telephone in the place of Bell, who had access to Meucci's materials and who took out a patent 16 years later.

"It is the sense of the House of Representatives that the life and achievements of Antonio Meucci should be recognised, and his work in the invention of the telephone should be acknowledged," the resolution stated.

Bell's immortalisation in books and films has rankled with generations of Italians with knowledge of Meucci's story. Born in 1808, he studied design and mechanical engineering at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, and as a stage technician at the city's Teatro della Pergola developed a primitive system — basically two cans tied with string — to help colleagues communicate.

In the 1830s he moved to Cuba and, while working on methods to treat illnesses with electric shocks, found that sounds could travel through copper wire. Sensing potential, he moved to Staten Island, near New York City, in

1850 to develop the technology.

When Meucci's wife, Ester, became paralysed he rigged a system to link her bedroom with his neighbouring workshop and in 1860 held a public demonstration which was reported in New York's Italian-language press.

In between giving shelter to political exiles, Meucci struggled to find financial backing, failed to master English and was severely burned in an accident aboard a steamship.

Forced to make new prototype telephones after Ester sold his machines for six dollars to a secondhand shop, his models became more sophisticated. An inductor formed around an iron

core in the shape of a cylinder was a technique so sophisticated that it was used decades later for long-distance connections.

Meucci could not afford the 250 dollars needed for a definitive patent for his "talking telegraph" so in 1871 filed a one-year renewable notice of an impending patent. Three years later he could not even afford the 10 dollars to renew it.

He sent a model and technical details to the Western Union telegraph company but failed to win a meeting with executives. When he asked for his materials to be returned, in 1874, he was told they had been lost. Two years

posed to be the
beginnings and bionic eve!

S House

as a later Bell, who shared a laboratory
was with Meucci, filed a patent for a tele-
nce phone, became a celebrity and made a
lucrative deal with Western Union.

dol- Meucci sued and was nearing victory
for - the supreme court agreed to hear the
led case and fraud charges were initiated
an against Bell - when the Florentine died
r he in 1889. The legal action died with him.

s to Yesterday the newspaper La
Repubblica welcomed the vote to
ical recognise the Tuscan inventor as a
raph belated comeuppance for Bell, a "cun-
eting ning Scotsman" and "usurper" whose
r his perfidy built a communications
t, he empire.—*Dawn/The Guardian News*
years *Service.*