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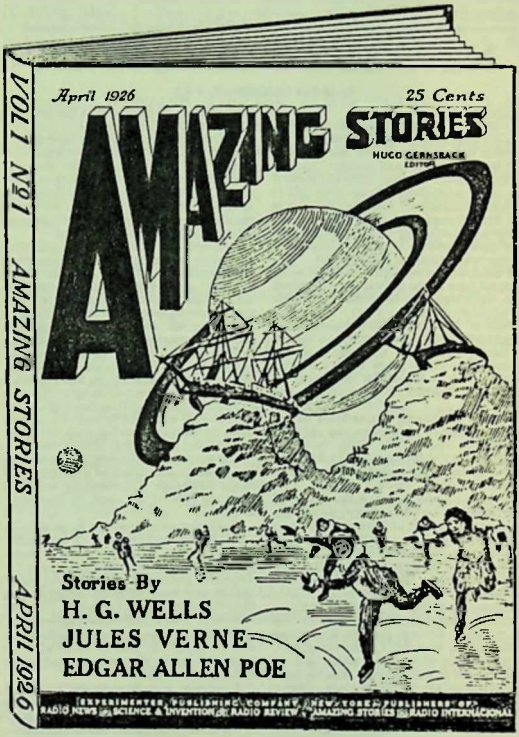
Beginning:
Sixty Years of



Volume 1

AMAZING STORIES

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENTIFICTION

April, 1926 No. 1.

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Editorial and General Offices - - - 53 Park Place, New York, N. Y.

Extravagant Fiction Today - - - - - - - - Cold Fact Tomorrow

A NEW SORT OF MAGAZINE

By HUGO GERNSBACK, F.R.S.

ANOTHER fiction magazine!

At first thought it does seem impossible that there could be room for another fiction magazine in this country. The readers may well wonder, "Aren't there enough already, with the several hundreds now being published?" True. But this is not "another fiction magazine." AMAZING STORIES is a new kind of fiction magazine! It is entirely new—entirely different—something that has never been done before in this country. Therefore, AMAZING STORIES deserves your attention and interest.

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type, and so on, but a magazine of "Scientifiction" is a pioneer in its field in America.

By "scientifiction" I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision. For many years stories of this nature were published in the sister magazines of AMAZING STORIES—"SCIENCE & INVENTION" and "RADIO NEWS."

But with the ever increasing demands on us for this sort of story, and more of it, there was only one thing to do—publish a magazine in which the scientific fiction type of story will hold forth exclusively. Toward that end we have laid elaborate plans, sparing neither time nor money.

Edgar Allan Poe may well be called the father of "scientifiction." It was he who really originated the romance, cleverly weaving into and around the story, a scientific thread. Jules Verne, with his amazing romances, also cleverly interwoven with a scientific thread, came next. A little later came H. G. Wells, whose scientifiction stories, like those of his forerunners, have become famous and immortal.

It must be remembered that we live in an entirely new world. Two hundred years ago, stories of this kind were not possible. Science, through its various branches of mechanics, electricity, astronomy, etc., enters so intimately into all our lives today, and we are so much immersed in this science, that we have become rather prone to take new inventions and discoveries for granted. Our entire mode of living has changed with the present progress, and it is little wonder, therefore, that many fantastic situations—impossible 100 years ago—are brought about today. It is in these situations that the new romancers find their great inspiration.

Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they are also always instructive. They supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain—and they supply it in a very palatable form. For the best of these modern writers of scientifiction have the knack of imparting knowledge, and even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught.

And not only that! Poe, Verne, Wells, Bellamy, and many others have proved themselves real prophets. Prophesies made in many of their most amazing stories are being realized—and have been realized. Take the fantastic submarine of Jules Verne's most famous story, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" for instance. He predicted the present day submarine almost down to the last bolt! New inventions pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow. Many great science stories destined to be of an historical interest are still to be written, and AMAZING STORIES magazine will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well.

We who are publishing AMAZING STORIES realize the great responsibility of this undertaking, and will spare no energy in presenting to you, each month, the very best of this sort of literature there is to offer.

Exclusive arrangements have already been made with the copyright holders of the entire voluminous works of ALL of Jules Verne's immortal stories. Many of these stories are not known to the general American public yet. For the first time they will be within easy reach of every reader through AMAZING STORIES. A number of German, French and English stories of this kind by the best writers in their respective countries, have already been contracted for and we hope very shortly to be able to enlarge the magazine and in that way present always more material to our readers.

How good this magazine will be in the future is up to you. Read AMAZING STORIES—get your friends to read it and then write us what you think of it. We will welcome constructive criticism—for only in this way will we know how to satisfy you.

SIXTY YEARS OF AMAZING STORIES

So Amazing Stories (and, therefore, science fiction) has been in existence for sixty years; published continuously although changing ownership several times and with many editors. This is quite a notable record.

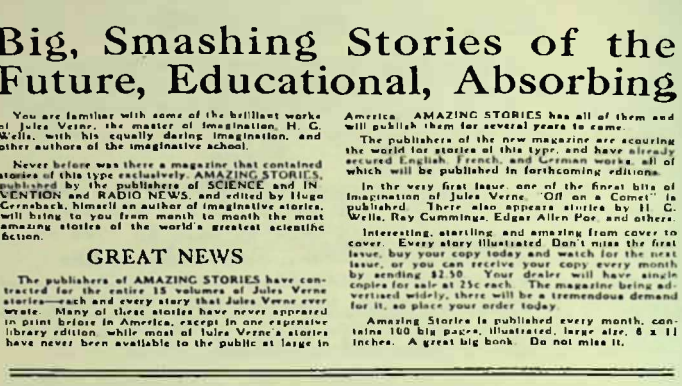
How many popular periodicals make it to their sixtieth anniversary? Not many. Of all the many all-fiction magazines that were on sale in 1926 -- Adventure, Argosy, Black Mask, Blue Book, Clues, Flynn's, Everybody's, Flying Aces, Love Story, Mystery Stories, Popular, Romance, Short Stories, Top Notch, West, War Birds, Weird Tales and a hundred or so more -- none other remains.

Amazing Stories created a new publishing category, although it must be said that when competition appeared it lost the initiative and never recovered it. It has rarely been seen as leading the way in any positive sense. Yet it has continued, surviving when others failed. Thoroughly bad magazines like Marvel Tales, barely tolerable magazines like Planet Stories, acceptable magazines like Startling Stories, worth-while magazines like Infinity, Satellite, If, Galaxy, Galileo, Unearth, Worlds Beyond...gone, all gone. Amazing remains.

Let us take a look at its career.

At its advent with the April 1926 issue, Amazing was rather more impressive than the present wizened remnant. Its bulky 11" format set it apart from the fiction magazines of the time which were typically smaller, thinner and with rough edges emphasising their cheapness.

In his leading article Hugo Gernsback said in effect that while the plethora of magazines already on sale appealed to most tastes there was an opening for something quite different; that it embodied an idea whose time had come; that the literature it was to promote had educational and inspirational value of some importance beyond its appeal as entertainment; that it was sure to grow and mature



Big, Smashing Stories of the Future, Educational, Absorbing

You are familiar with some of the brilliant works of Jules Verne, the master of imagination, H. G. Wells, with his equally daring imagination, and other authors of the imaginative school.

Never before was there a magazine that contained stories of this type exclusively. AMAZING STORIES, published by the publishers of SCIENCE and INVENTION and RADIO NEWS, and edited by Hugo Gernsback, himself an author of imaginative stories, will bring to you from month to month the most amazing stories of the world's greatest scientific fiction.

GREAT NEWS

The publishers of AMAZING STORIES have contracted for the entire 15 volumes of Jules Verne stories—each and every story that Jules Verne ever wrote. Many of these stories have never appeared in print before in America, except in one expensive library edition, while most of Jules Verne's stories have never been available to the public at large in America. AMAZING STORIES has all of them and will publish them for several years to come.

The publishers of the new magazine are scouring the world for stories of this type, and have already secured English, French, and German works, all of which will be published in forthcoming editions.

In the very first issue, one of the finest bits of imagination of Jules Verne, "Off on a Comet" is published. There also appears stories by H. G. Wells, Ray Cummings, Edgar Allen Poe, and others.

Interesting, startling, and amazing from cover to cover. Every story illustrated. Don't miss the first issue, buy your copy today and watch for the next issue, or you can receive your copy every month by sending $2.50. Your dealer will have single copies for sale at 25c each. The magazine being advertised widely, there will be a tremendous demand for it, so place your order today.

Amazing Stories is published every month, contains 100 big pages, illustrated, large size, 8 x 11 inches. A great big book. Do not miss it.

Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

beyond these immodest beginnings; and that as a popular phenomenon it would surely be moulded by popular taste into what its readership demanded. Events have shown him right on every score.

The stories making up the first issue were as follows:

Off on a Comet (1st of 2 parts) -- Jules Verne
The New Accelerator -- H. G. Wells
The Man from the Atom -- 1st of 2 parts) -- G. P. Wertenbaker
The Thing from... Outside -- George Allan England
The Man who Saved the Earth -- Austin Hall
The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar -- Edgar Allan Poe

Well, of course, as we can see immediately, this was not the start of something altogether new. All of these stories had seen print before and three of them could fairly be called established classics. Following issues continued to draw on existing resources, with new stories only gradually infiltrating and taking over.

What was new was the concept that unified the magazine. What Gernsback did with this latest of many innovative projects was bring together stories that had been scattered through the popular reading of the previous two generations and earlier and make it clear that they were part of a hitherto unrecognised tradition -- and give that tradition a name.

There were already the great pioneering works of Verne and Wells -- and of Doyle, Griffith, Burroughs, Cummings, Farley, Merritt and many more who were to be recognised as forerunners. For some years some magazines like Argosy had been frequently printing stories that we would now call science fiction. But that was the point. They had no name then. Verne's novels were collectively described by his publisher as "voyages imaginaires", not accurate but used for want of better; Those of Wells were tagged "scientific romances" but it was not generalised; terms like "pseudo-scientific" and "different stories" appeared in Argosy. None took on. Gernsback had printed many short stories and serials in Science & Invention, Radio News and so on, and thought of "Scientifiction" by 1923.

Science fiction needed to be recognised as a distinct entity needing a specific term. More importantly it needed a definite outlet and forum.

When a body of stories was brought together out of many places of concealment a critical mass was assembled and a chain reaction started. By its very existence Amazing Stories established the idea of a special kind of writing with its own character and potentialities. It provided a market for stories that would not otherwise have been written. And by its success it suggested that there was room for other magazines in the field.

These stories had in common that they were about scientific possibilities. Gernsback's first

thought, "scientific fiction" was not quite right; the contraction "scientifiction" was not good enough. It was not for another three years that he was to hit on the simpler "science fiction". In later years pedants, partisans and assorted pipsqueaks were to fret over the term and quibble over how best to define it. But it was universally adopted as soon as introduced precisely because it was self-defining. Uncounted readers who had long been interested in the field without being able to give a satisfactory name to that interest immediately knew that yes, that was what to call it.

Obviously in looking at science fiction as a whole we have to take account of what happened before Amazing, but let's not overdo it. It is easy to overestimate the importance of the preliminary -- let's say the pre-explicit period. Many times more has been written since 1926 than we can possibly find of interest before then. More important, in a few years science fiction developed standards, techniques, conventions and intangible qualities all its own, which had never had a chance to appear before. By 1930 it was a clearly identifiable branch of popular fiction: new writers however individual wrote something consistent with what was being published. But growth and development went ahead at breathless speed. The basic sense of discovery and anticipation has not been lost, but the typical story of 1930 or even of 1935 was beginning to seem old-fashioned and quaint to readers in 1940. To be sure, the rate of change slowed later and there was more continuity and consistency. But the ambiance of 1986 is not the same as that of 1966.

Yet there was a background to the new movement as that first issue makes obvious. People interested in tracing ideas back to their earliest appearance have found very remote examples: but in truth there was little before the time of Verne and

Wells (which was as well the time of Doyle, Griffith, Laurie, Donnelly, Stockton, Lasswitz, Serviss, Shiel, Hodgson and more) that had any impact or influence.

There were many 19th Century examples, and going back further there were some in the period when astronomy and physics were getting properly started. We can pass by these because they didn't really lead anywhere.

If you'll just bear with me though, I will say something about the earliest fossil usually cited by historians of science fiction: Lucian of Samosata, who wrote the first two tales about reaching the Moon.

Lucian, who lived from about 120 to 180 AD, came from the Syrian city of Samosata on the Euphrates: it's still there as Samsat though now it's Turkish. Careless writers sometimes wrongly identify him as Lucian of Samos (an island off the western Turkish coast near Izmir of Smyrna) or of Samothrace (an island in the northern Aegean west of the Dardanelles). He studied philosophy at Athens, travelled around the Mediterranean and settled in Alexandria where he practiced as an advocate -- more a debater and PR agent than a lawyer -- and wrote numerous works.

Of the two tales relevant here, Icaromenippus describes a man-powered flight to the Moon by flapping wings, as an excuse for philosophical debate. In A True Story Lucian tells in the first person how on a voyage into the unknown Atlantic his ship ran into bad weather and was blown all the way to the Moon. The crew joined in a war between the Moon and Sun before returning to the Ocean to see such marvels as flying cabbages, cork-footed folk who walk on water, an open canyon in the sea and an island of dream monsters, and to be gulped and fortunately disgorged by a good sized whale.

The point is that Lucian was not just an early

Munchhausen but a satirist, sending up sensational travel tales of his time that haven't survived. But what does he have to do with science fiction? Not much. Even though Wells had read him, and it is possible to see parallels between Icaromenippus and The First Men in the Moon in a very general sense.

Well then, consider the April 1926 issue.

The oldest piece is Poe's The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar, from 1845. This is a weird-supernatural item by modern ideas, but in its time it had what passes for a scientific theme: a terminal patient who due to hypnosis does not realise that he is dead. Poe served mainly to give the magazine an air of respectability. The new literature could not yet afford to seem too new, perhaps.

Off on a Comet is one of Verne's less familiar works, not surprisingly. It was decidedly low in plausibility in 1877, with a passing comet carrying off a sliver of Earth's surface on a round trip to the vicinity of Saturn. But is did give an excuse to feature Saturn on the cover, for the first of many times on a science fiction magazine.

The New Accelerator, from 1901, about a means of living at a greatly increased rate compared to the rest of the world, is still a standard. Few others have done much with the idea. It is a typical example of a story built around a single radical invention, one of the basic types of science fiction plot.

Wertenbaker's The Man from the Atom, from Science & Invention August 1923 -- the Special Scientifiction Issue which first hinted at the possibility of a separate SF magazine -- was a remarkable story for a sixteen-year-old to produce, but that was his age. It enlarges, if you will excuse the expression, on the size-change concept introduced by Ray Cummings in The Girl in the Golden Atom, something to strain credulity to its

limits, but it was fairly popular in early years. In this case our hero is enlarged to the point of entering a super-universe in which the world he left is an elementary particle.

The Thing from -- Outside, another from Science & Invention, Apr 1923, is an atmospheric suspense story of an encounter with an unearthly menace that still holds up fairly well. England wrote voluminously for the adventure magazines and produced many others of interest, but this was perhaps his best.

The outstanding story in the issue, though, is Hall's The Man who Saved the Earth, from Argosy in 1919. It is a compelling story of an alien threat to our world. After preliminary attacks with an annihilating force the Martians (as we eventually learn) get down to business with it, taking water from our ocean through an extradimensional route to refresh their desiccated planet. A counterattack stops the project -- for how long, we might wonder -- after they have taken what may be enough for their needs.

There is a minimum of detail, everything vividly suggested rather than explained, in contrast to the common wordy detailings of the period. Although dated in some assumptions The Man who Saved the Earth remains valid in its expression of confidence in the survival of intelligence against natural forces. If Earth fights off the Martians, they have fought to overcome the failure of their environment by reaching out for new resources. A story that can still be recommended.

Wells was clearly the predominant figure. He was represented in Amazing's first twenty-nine issues, a record not matched by anyone other than editors or the columnists of more recent times. The eighteen short stories were not all his best, or all science fiction. But there was the curious contact with the Martians in The Crystal Egg; the natural catastrophe due to close passage of The

Star; the challenge of non-human intelligences in The Empire of the Ants and In the Abyss; an extinct species found surviving in Aepyornis Island; an other-dimensional episode in The Plattner Story.

Five important Wells novels were serialised in less than two years. The Island of Dr. Moreau put the question: what is Man? How to define what we are, where are the limits?

The First Men in the Moon made space flight too easy by using anti-gravity (not a first but not previously used to much effect) but gave a joyous vision of reaching another world; and it showed a non-human culture and its probable view of us.

The Time Machine made tangible the idea of time travel that earlier writers had only fumblingly hinted at, in its brilliant opening chapter, avoiding any hint of the difficulties and paradoxes that were to cloud the vision. And it looked at one possible distant future with compelling clarity.

The War of the Worlds again introduced another kind of intelligence and considered how becoming one inhabited planet among others would change human perspectives, as well as giving a memorable picture of the civilisation of 1898 crumbling under the first attack of a moderately superior force.

The Invisible Man showed the solitary enemy of society in action exploiting a unique advantage, and it took the simple idea of invisibility and worked out some of its consequences.

Then, as now, many readers must have known these already. But they were fresher, not obscured by a host of other authors' use of the same themes, and they did much to give the new literature substance. Today they are all more or less dated, yet they still have much to say to us. It remains true that if you haven't read Wells you haven't read science fiction.

Verne, second of the three names emphasised in the first announcements, had something in the first eight issues and was seen from time to time later, but we may guess that he was not as strong an attraction as Gernsback had supposed. The promise to print all his considerable output was not followed up. A few of his 64 books had advanced ideas in their day and some were still being read by 1926, but generally they were decidedly out of date. Not only had most of the once wonderful inventions either been surpassed or bypassed, the society the books showed and reflected had undergone great changes and some of the behavior of people in them no longer seemed reasonable. The generally pedestrian English translations had not stood up well and were no longer contemporary in tone.

Off on a Comet was followed by the misleadingly titled A Trip to the Centre of the Earth, which though a fairly good adventure story with some appeal even today was nevertheless tame and implausible for its context in Amazing. Then came Dr. Ox's Experiment, a lightweight short about getting a whole village high on oxygen. The Purchase of the North Pole had much talk and little action though its basic theme, a project to shift Earth's axis a little to modify the seasons, was sensational enough. A Drama in the Air, very much a period piece about a nightmare balloon trip with a demented balloon enthusiast, was an excellent short piece. After more than a year came Robur the Conqueror, in which an aerial version of Captain Nemo flits arrogantly about the 19th Century scene in his marvellous and unrivalled flying machine. The continuation Master of the World followed directly. By that time, March 1928, its last part was something far remote from the more extravagant interplanetary and soon interstellar stories that were becoming staple fare.

As for Poe, his presence as a respected figure from a century earlier was presumably thought to add a little class to an unorthodox publication at the outset, but he was well out of tune with the 1920's. Amazing did not need more respectability than Wells and Verne provided, and readers cannot have appreciated him much.

In the same 29 issues the runners-up in frequency of appearance were three varied talents -- A. Hyatt Verrill, in nine issues with eight stories; David H. Keller, with eight stories; and Garrett P. Serviss, in seven consecutive issues with two novels and one longish short story.

Alpheus Hyatt Verrill (1871-1954) was a bona fide field archaeologist who worked in various South American areas and wrote both factually and fancifully about them later. Of these stories on varied themes Beyond the Pole (Oct-Nov 1926) telling of a civilisation of urbane giant lobsters, has the most interest.

Dr Keller, a psychiatrist, turned out a vast quantity of writing in his professional field, much miscellaneous literature and scores of long and short fictional pieces. Many of his science fiction stories express such aberrant and bizarre viewpoints that it would be easier to suppose not knowing his background that he was a psychiatric patient. They often present ferocious satire on common human shortcomings in a bland, understated style, and there are ideosyncrasies all his own that mark them unmistakably as his work. The Revolt of the Pedestrians, familiar through various reprintings, with its crazy world of people hopelessly enslaved by their cars and unable to live without them, is a mythic rather than fictional work whose meaning is all the more real today.

Garrett Putnam Serviss (1851-1929) was a popular science writer who produced some fiction, commencing with Edison's Conquest of Mars, commissioned by a newspaper as a sequel to The War of the Worlds in 1898. Amazing reprinted the three science fiction books he had published in his lifetime.

The Moon Metal (July 1926) was one of a rash of tales around its time of original printing in 1900 based on the upsetting of one of the most universal and inexplicable superstitions, that gold has enormous value. In this case civilisation reels when vast new discoveries depress its price and a synthetic substitute is introduced.

A Columbus of Space (Aug-Oct) has the traditional tinkerer privately develop atomic power and use it to travel to Venus to get involved with the local royalty. Human Venerians of course, more acceptable in 1909.

The Second Deluge (Nov 1926-Jan 1927) describes an aqueous nebula meeting Earth and inundating all inhabited land. A new Noah saves a select few. In 1911 and again 1927 there seems to have been little outrage at this. Though to be sure Serviss' hero tries to spread the word to save more.

Murray Leinster's The Runaway Skyscraper of 1919 was his first appearance in Amazing in the third issue. William Fitzgerald Jenkins (1896-1975) who usually wrote SF under this name, was still writing for Amazing forty years later. This was a slight and confused piece about time travel. Much more interesting were The Mad Planet (November) and sequel The Red Dust (Jan 1927) with primitive humans in a remote future of monster insects. It is interesting that he was able to complete the series, rationalising it as happening on a distant planet but scarcely touching the original tales, in the book Forgotten Planet in 1954. Dating is not always a bar to acceptability.

Curt Siodmak, author of a few later SF books and film director noted for F.P.1 Does Not Reply and Donovan's Brain, had another giant insect tale in July 1926. George McLeod Winsor's Station X from 1919 commenced in this issue also. It had a top secret radio installation pick up interplanetary messages and find that the Martians are about to muscle in. It has not been reprinted since the Amazing serialisation but would stand revival better than many of its age.

Richard Adams Locke, a contemporary of Poe -- who regarded him without admiration -- wrote a supposedly factual series of reports in the New York Sun in 1835 of life on the Moon seen through a revolutionary new telescope, one of the most successful though absurd scientific hoaxes ever. One of several book versions was reprinted here in September.

Another very early item, with a wild charm of its own, was Fitz-James O'Brien's The Diamond Lens, from 1858, reprinted in December. Here it is a microscope of enormous power that reveals a microhuman race.

Of course, not all of the material was much good. There were badly written shorts with feeble content. A considerable element of stories rescued from Gernsback's radio magazines were for the most part trivial and tended to illustrate that it is not easy to write humorous SF.

1927, the first full year, had a better standard. The magazine had hit its stride and new stories were just in the majority though there were impressive reprints. The Moon Pool by the popular A. Merritt followed his tantalisingly brief The People of the Pit, adding color and romance to the mix. Edgar Rice Burroughs made the first of disappointingly few appearances with The Land that Time Forgot: villainous German submariners, a lost island,

examples of various geological ages in the local fauna, winged people, ape-people and people-people. Hair-raising biological speculation, and withal the characteristic Burroughs cliffhanger-punctuated action. Who could ask for more?

Miles J. Breuer was a new writer of some talent with The Man with the Strange Head (proved to be a man-brained robot). He is best remembered now for the later The Gostak and the Doshes, a classic satire on social conformity and gullibility. Another able newcomer was Alfred Johannes Olsen, who wrote as Bob Olsen, with The Four-Dimansional Roller Press in June. He returned to the theme of a higher dimension several times. H. P. Lovecraft, established in Weird Tales, had the memorable The Colour out of Space in September, an atmospheric tale of an insubstantial and amorphous nasty landed here from the terror-haunted cosmos via meteor.

The readership seemed enough for more magazines than one, and the proposal for supplementary issues jelled as the 1927 Annual, issued in July. Its fame as one of SF's leading collectables rests on several points but the first printing of Burroughs' The Master Mind of Mars was its strongest point at the time. It was the only new material: Merritt's The Face in the Abyss was there from 1923 Argosy, as well as The People of the Pit and four more already run in Amazing. Yet it sold well at 50 cents, a stiff price then. Amazing's 25c was high for a start, most fiction magazines selling for 10c. The next move was obvious, a 50c Quarterly featuring complete novels with good backing shorts, and it commenced in 1928.

Paul painted all the covers while Gernsback controlled the magazine and provided most of the interior art which at this period was not very attractive. But other forgotten names appear on some of the pictures: Wardell, Hynd, Gambee, de Aragon.

T. O'Conor Sloane as Associate Editor was sup-

ported by C. A. Brandt and Wilbur C. Whitehead, both credited as Literary Editor. Brandt, an entnusiast witn an extensive knowledge of the earlier proto-SF period, unearthed many of the reprints as well as translating some from other languages. Whitehead's role was probably similar. In August 1928 Miriam Bourne appeared as Associate Editor. This team stayed on when Gernsback left in 1929, or rather had his command shot from under him by a surprise bankruptcy. From soon after Brandt justified his title by reviewing books. Bourne is understood to have done most of the production side of editing for the next few years. But this is getting ahead of our story a little.

(To be continued)

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