FADEAWAY #28 is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email fabficbks@aol.com. Copies are available for a letter of comment, or a print fanzine in trade, or by subscription at a cost of $15.00 for six issues. Letters of comment are much preferred. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a sample copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address.
Publication is bi-monthly, but I may step up the schedule whenever I feel the urge. This is the April-May 2012 issue. This issue will also be distributed thru the Southern Fandom Press Alliance mailing #286.

This is another busy issue and even with many added pages, things are going to be pretty tight this time round, so I’m going to have to hold the editorial comments down to a bare minimum.

In the past I’ve tried to keep the page count of this fanzine at around 26 pages per issue, but I’m now pretty much resigned to abandoning that concept. For one thing the recent letter columns have been very large (which is a good thing), and the length of articles and reviews also tend to be long, so beginning this issue the page count will be going up. The page count this issue is going to log in at forty-four pages, but in the future we’ll probably be dealing with totals somewhere in the mid thirties. Fanzine publishing is not an exact science.

Also, and yet again, I must remind folks that altho I try to be an easy guy to get along with, that it costs more money to produce bigger issues, not to also mention the new higher postal rates for sending these issues out.

I am always happy to send copies of this fanzine out to those who are interested. How do I know if you are interested? Well, you could write a letter of comment on this issue. Or you could send a copy of your own print fanzine in trade, or even write some articles or contribute some artwork to help us out. As a method of final resort, you could also subscribe to the publication at the bargain rate of $15.00 for six issues. This subscription rate will go up next issue, by the way.

The economics of producing an amateur fanzine are considerably grittier these days than in times past, so I must say, again, that people who do not respond in some way to this magazine, either with letters of comment, or material, or a fanzine in trade, or a subscription, will be dropped from the mailing list. I simply can’t afford to send out copies of this publication to people who don’t have any interest in it, and I won’t.

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**Foster's forgotten comics present:**

"Zero Heroes"

**The Flustered Five**

- Captain Chagrined
- Doctor Disconcerted
- The Frustrated Man
- Mr. Mortified
- Bashful Girl

This group of uniquely powered individuals spent most of their stories in long discussions, attempting to justify not leaving the privacy of their secret headquarters to fight evil. (All had the same super-weakness: they could literally die of embarrassment!) The various writers on the series managed to milk this incredibly thin concept for 42 issues!


plus these solo spin-offs:

"Retired: The Nonadventures of Frustrated Man" #1-3 (1999)
"Dr. Disconcerted" one-shot (2003)
"Bashful Girl Gets A Life" #1-6 (2006, 2007)
Rick Norwood’s *Comics Revue* magazine has been around a long time now, for almost thirty years. Its entire existence has been devoted to the simple theme that classic newspaper comic strips, including some brand new classics, ought to be reprinted in a more permanent format and given wider distributor so those who love comic strips can enjoy them.

There have been ups and downs for the publication thru the years, as well as a number of format changes, however I think this latest and newest format is the best one and the one that should be maintained in the future. The square bound trade paperback format with quality inside paper provides a handsome and a permanent repository for the comic strips that Rick has decided to reprint. Some may cringe at the $19.95 cover price, but considering what you are getting in each issue---128 pages of top quality classic comic strip reprints mostly taken from the original proofs, it’s a bargain. Most of the comic strips reprinted in these issues are runs of daily strips from forty to eighty years in the past. And for those who are interested, the $59/6 issue subscription rate means you are getting each issue for ten bucks, and each issue is sent to you in a sturdy manila mailing envelope so it arrives in Near Mint condition.

The setup is that each issue features a long, complete adventure from one of the action strips in the headline slot, with the other strips running as monthly sequential reprints filling out the issue. Often the cover illo corresponds to the strip being featured with the extended story that issue, but not this time. This issue features a cover illo and a somewhat longer section devoted to the adventures of Modesty Blaise. For those few who might not know, Modesty Blaise was a top flight British good girl action strip that started in 1963 and finished its run in 2001. Modesty and her friend Willy Garvin act as special agents traveling the world to unravel spy missions, confront extraordinary criminals, and right wrongs committed by the rich and decadent who appear to be above the law. Officially they are connected with some sort of quasi-legal UK government agency, but much of the time they operate free lance and have assorted friends and patrons around the world to assist them with their missions.
The fact that all of the strips are currently in reprint as trade paperbacks from British publishers, or even that *Comics Revue* has already reprinted every single Modesty Blaise comic strips several times over the years has not affected the enduring popularity of this feature with the magazine’s regular readers. This means we are likely to see Modesty Blaise reprints continuing for as long as *Comics Revue* continues to exist.

This issue features a very long Modesty strip reprint section, actually half of “The Young Mistress” adventure, with the other half to follow up next issue. The complete feature this time round is a double shot, with a complete Tarzan and a complete Rick O’Shay sequent offered as lead-offs for the issue.

The rest of the magazine is taken up with sequential reprints of Buz Sawyer, Mandrake the Magician (from the early thirties), Ally Oop (from the late 1930s), Flash Gordon, Sir Bagsby, the Phantom, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley, Secret Agent Corrigan, Krazy Kat and more. There is a full page, slick paper section in the center where Sunday comics are reprinted in full color usually in half page size. Color strips currently include Mandrake, Flash Gordon, Latigo, and Tarzan (by Russ Manning). In addition the Sunday pages for Steve Canyon and Gasoline Alley are reprinted in color and placed in the sequential date sections for each of those strips.

This is a nice package, with lots of nice material. I do have some objections to the way some of the material is presented. For example, in trying to reprint both the Mandrake and the Alley Oop strips, the original panel sizes are too large for comfortable formatting within the 8-1/2x11” page, which leads to very odd arrangements of three or five panels per page. It would be simpler to reduce the size of the panels or just run them vertically. I don’t think the people who care about the strips would object to a vertical presentation.

The reprints of the daily Krazy Kat are run full size across two pages, which means you get very few Kat strips per issue. I am not a fan of the daily Krazy Kat strip, and here again, every single one of these things have been reprinted in trade paperbacks before, making this effort sort of redundant.

Even more redundant is the reprinting of Steve Canyon. Steve Canyon is a comic strip beloved by many because of the great art and the interesting characters Milton Caniff introduced thru the years. However Steve Canyon has been reprinted at least four time already thru the years, and if even now being reprinted yet again in hardback form by IDW, so why is *Comics Revue* running it?

I have personal objections to Steve Canyon, namely, that the stories are inconclusive and meandering. Canyon is supposed to be out there acting as a trouble shooter and solving problems, but he solves almost nothing, and most adventures stop inconclusively with the plot situations and characters left dangling. The introduction of interesting personalities is excellent, but these people are often abandoned in perilous situations as Caniff shifts his attention to developing some new, and often contrary plot sequence far removed geographically from the previous sequence.

There are thousands of other great comic strips out there that deserve to be reprinted. I personally wish that Rick would cut back on material like Canyon and K Kat that have been extensively reprinted already and allocate that space to other material. However, it’s his magazine, and he gets to decide what gets printed.

My objections are also mine alone and does not affect my overall view of the book. This is a fine publication that does an excellent job of preserving and reprinting some of the golden heritage of daily and Sunday comic strips. It is unlikely, likely impossible even, that most of this material will ever be reprinted elsewhere. If you enjoy the newspaper comic strip then you will want to subscribe to this magazine. It is a joy
to read, and the trade paperback format makes it easy to shelve or store. I recommend it to everyone with an interest in the comics.

OTHER COMIC STRIP VOLUMES

Yes, time once again to take brief glances at some of the newer (or newish, it’s been awhile since I last did this) comic strip reprint volumes produced by assorted publishers. Today is a virtual golden age for comic strip fans, with a stream of new hardback and trade paperback volumes reprinting classic comic strips features. My suggestion, as always, is that if you see something offered that you like, you should buy it right away, without delay. While certain very popular strips, such as Terry & the Pirates, Steve Canyon and Dick Tracy seem to get full scale reprints every decade or so, these are the exceptions. Comic strip reprint books are almost always an act of love produced by true fans who want to share their enthusiasm for these strips with their fellow collectors, and the sad fact is that most comic strip reprint volumes lose money. They almost never go into second printings, and once they are gone, they are gone forever. So again, if you come across a comic strip reprint book that interests you, buy it; buy it right away, before it disappears forever.

MICKEY MOUSE: “Race to Death Valley”; by Floyd Gottfredson; Fantagraphics Books; 10-1/2x9”; Hardcover; 288 pages; $29.99---review by Bob Jennings

This is volume 1 of Fantagraphics’s ambitious project to reprint all of the Floyd Gottfredson daily Mickey Mouse comic strips, beginning with the very first one in 1930 and going in complete sequential order.

What can be said about the Mickey Mouse comic strip that virtually everyone doesn’t already know? It’s a masterpiece of brilliant cartoon art starring Walt Disney’s premiere cartoon movie star in a series of comedic adventures. There are laughs aplenty, but there is also high adventure, including suspense, thrills, danger and plenty of action. In recent decades the powers at Disney Inc have refused to allow Mr. Mouse engage in any adventure more perilous than battling a rush of Christmas shoppers or mowing his yard, but back in the days when the strip first started Mickey was a world class adventurer; an Everyman with a sense of humor, willing to travel the world, investigate any bizarre mystery, and not afraid to confront any peril that confronted him or his friends.

This is a wonderful book, and a wonderful project. I wish Fantagraphics had printed the book a bit larger and allowed some more white space between each of the three strips printed per page, because some of those panels are pretty busy, art wise, and it’s hard to drink it all in from this somewhat constricted perspective. But this is a very trivial objection.

This volume also comes with extensive background information on Gottfredson and the creation of the strip, with photos and rare sketch art, bonus material you will not find anywhere else.

If you have not bought this book yet, I suggest you do so right away. Volume 2 is already out and #3 will be out next month. But Fantagraphics no longer lists Volume One as being available on their web-site. They do have the slipcase edition which offers volume 1 and volume 2 together, but indications are that the printing on this first volume has either sold out or is about to do so. Some sources that have offered this book on the Internet at discounted prices no longer do so. Just a word to the wise, get this (and Volume 2) before it becomes impossible to find.
Here is another long overdue project; the reprinting of one of the most significant comics strips featuring a female protagonist ever created. Part adventure strip, part soap opera, part character study, part romance, partly a mainstream contemporary story of manners, this was one of the most popular comic strips in the world for decades, and yet except for some random comic book issues, and a couple of small booklet efforts back in the early 1980s, very little of this series has ever been reprinted.

The saga of Dale Messick and her determination to become a comic strip artist, as well as events from the rest of her life, is almost as interesting as the adventures of her creation. This volume provides some useful of background material, but it really barely scratches the surface. Married multiple times, Messick was an inventive writer and an OK artist who got better and better thru the years by sheer determination and grit. She was absolutely determined to become successful in the comic strip field, and after a lot of false starts and stumbles along the way, she finally succeeded in getting her creation accepted at the Chicago Tribune in 1940, but only as a Sunday strip, and it did not appear as part of the regular Sunday comics section either; instead it was segregated to part of a special comic book size insert the paper printed. Still, the location offered 16 panels, sufficient for Messick to get her new heroine into a load of adventure and trouble right off the bat.

When the Sunday strip finally began selling across the country, the syndicate somewhat reluctantly authorized a daily strip to follow, and that’s when the feature really fleshed out and took off.

Along the way and all the way up to the very end with her retirement from the feature in the early 1980s at an advanced age, Messick kept her eye on the prize. She had no illusions about the business she was in. It is easy today to gush about her skill and initiative of making the female reporting career an acceptable and a popular role model for young women, and she certainly did that.

But many people seem willing to forget that “Brenda Starr” was also a good girl art strip with the protagonist and most of the female supporting characters, friends and villains alike, pictured dressed at the height of contemporary fashion; providing those fashions were girly-feminine, often revealing, and allowed Messick to display low cut bodices with plenty of female leg and bare midriffs on a frequent and regular basis.

This volume offers a full reprinting of the opening years of the strip. All the Sunday strips are presented in full color, and not just color shot from old newspaper files either. Every one of the Sunday pages has been digitally remastered to provide crisp clear color balance without the fading, bleeding, off registry or large-dot matrix problems found on the printed Sunday pages.

Frankly, the earliest days of this strip are not very good, but Messick grows into the job rapidly, and manages to make optimum use of that sixteen panel format to deliver a very wide variety of adventures. By the time the daily strip was added she was ready to roll, and shifted the story plots into high gear.

This is an expensive book. $60.00 is a lot of money any way you cut it. However the volume is being discounted by a number of places including Barnes & Noble as well as several internet sellers. I recommend this book if you have an interest in “Brenda Starr”, or if you have any interest in American comic strips. The following volumes will have better adventures, better art, better personality clashes and more soap opera, but it’s nice to start at the beginning. Support this comic strip reprint volume before it disappears. This “Brenda Starr” reprint series is not just a rare event; it is a unique opportunity to experience a pivotal strip from the very beginning, and in full color.
YESTERDAY’S WORLD OF TOMORROW

The title of this article is a direct swipe from long-time science fiction editor Robert Lowndes. He used this as the title for some of his editorials for Science Fiction Stories and Future back in the late 1950s. I have always liked the title and the concept. For about forty years or so I have been toying with the idea of doing a similar feature using the exact same title if possible. Time marches on. SF Stories, Future, SF Quarterly, all the magazines Lawndes edited are long gone, and alas, so is Bob Lawndes himself. I don’t know if he would have approved of me using his title and his idea, but I’ve decided to do it anyway. The title should be self explanatory.

by

Robert Jennings

AIR WONDER STORIES; October 1929; Bedsheet sized pulp, 96 pages; Hugo Gernsback Editor, David Lasser, Fiction Editor

One of the first boom periods for the world of science fiction came along in mid 1929 and lasted almost fifteen months. This big surge in the popularity of the science fiction field was the direct
result of a major calamity in the fortunes of Hugo Gernsback, owner and publisher of the first magazine developed entirely to the science fiction genre.

Gernsback had created Amazing Stories in April 1926, and had followed the initial success of that magazine with a thick Amazing Stories Annual in 1927 and Amazing Stories Quarterly whose first issue hit the newstands with a Winter 1928 date.

The circulation of his science fiction magazines climbed rapidly and soon were selling thru about 100,000 copies per issue, a very respectable circulation, especially for the late 1920s, and most especially for a magazine specializing in science fiction. That circulation figure would stand as a pinnacle that would endure among science fiction publications for many years into the future.

But in the beginning of 1929 things went wrong for Gernsback. A group of his creditors, irritated by Gernsback’s continuous non-payment of their bills for merchandise and services, got together and entered a writ of involuntary bankruptcy against him.

Under the federal bankruptcy law of 1896, if a company’s creditors number greater than a dozen, and if at least three (preferably more) of the major creditors believe the company is deliberately hiding assets to avoid the payment of just debts, the matter may be laid before a bankruptcy court for resolution.

There has been speculation in the past about this, but as a matter of fact this wrinkle in the federal bankruptcy laws still exists today. In my own part of the world a local Massachusetts company was forced into involuntary bankruptcy this past summer for exactly the same reasons the creditors took Gernsback to court.

In both cases, the aim is not to create an actual bankruptcy or to drive the company out of business, but is primarily an effort to force the company to open its books so its assets can be examined. In these cases the firms initiating the actions believe the debtor company is deliberately hiding assets, and this action will allow a bankruptcy judge to force the debtor company to pay off its creditors before it is allowed to reorganize and continue on its merry way.

I think it’s fair to say that in almost all cases where this kind of legal action has been initiated hidden assets have been uncovered, the debtor firm has been forced to pay its creditors, and the parent company has to make some kind of resolution and reorganized efforts specifically stating that this situation will not occur again, then it is allowed to go back to operating whatever kind of business it was in before, presumably having learned the error of its ways.

But things worked out differently in the Gernsback bankruptcy case. Some of the specific information that follows comes from Mike Ashley’s and Robert A .W. Lowndes excellent book “The Gernsback Days” (Wildwood Press) that offers a detailed examination of Hugo Gernsback’s career in the development of science fiction.

Throughout his business career Gernsback had been a habitual later payer on all of his business debts, and apparently viewed his latest delinquency as nothing out of the ordinary. Unfortunately the primary people he owed money to were his printer, the Art Color Printing Company, the firm that turned out the issues of not just Amazing Stories, but also Science and Invention, Radio News, Your Body and all the other magazines Gernsback’s Experimenter Publishing Company relied on for its income. One of the other major creditors happened to be Bulkly, Dunton & Company, the firm that supplied the paper so the printer could turn out those magazines.

I leave it to the reader’s imagination to picture a magazine publisher so tight fisted that he bought his own paper from a supplier, had it shipped directly to his printer, and then insisted that the printer use that paper when printing up his magazines. I think it is fair to state that almost no other magazine publishers followed this bizarre chain of supply and demand in the production of their publications unless they happened to own their own printing press.

The magazine business is volatile, and printers, in particular, keep a very close eye on payment from their clients. If a client falls too far behind it’s a clear sign that business is bad, and most printers will either cut off the publisher, and/or sue the publisher to get the money owed them. Of all the people for a magazine publisher not to alienate, your printer is at the very top of the list. But that’s exactly what Gernsback did.

The printer and the paper company tired to work things out, first by inserting one of their employees, Ernest Macklin, into the Gernsback offices in the fall of 1928 to help sort out bills and prioritize them and also to determine how solvent the firm actually was. Macklin apparently reported back that sales on all the Gernsback magazine were good. Yet despite this, Gernsback did not pay up, and continued to fall even farther behind paying his bills. Finally the creditors had enuf.

...
Their bankruptcy action was filed on 20 February 1929 and certainly did not come as any surprise to Gernsback himself. He had been aware of a crisis building for months, and his creditors had warned him that legal action was going to be initiated unless he did something to resolve the situation.

A *New York Times* story announcing the action the following day and stated that Experimenter Publishing had liabilities of $600,000 and assets of $182,000, not a good sign at all. On the other hand, in a statement in the same article, Gernsback stated that Experimenter Publishing would be reorganized and “continue publication as heretofore. I am authorized to say that by the receiver.” In addition, he clearly stated that WRNY, his radio and television station was not affected and would continue normal operations. It was stated that the Irving Trust Company would be the temporary receiver and was placed in charge of running Experimenter’s daily operations.

But when the bankruptcy receiver took a closer look at the books it turned out things were not going to return to normal right away. In addition to the major companies that had initiated the bankruptcy action, the company owned hundreds of other debts, including short changing or not paying most of the writers and contributors to its magazines.

The company had clearly been mismanaged. To begin with Gernsback and his brother Sidney, who was the company treasurer, as well as Irving Manheimer the company Secretary at Experimenter Publications were receiving exceedingly generous salaries. Hugo Gernsback was being paid $54,340 per year, Sidney was getting $39,000.
Yet that red flag was not enough to sink the ship. The audit showed that all of the Gernsback magazines were quite profitable. So, besides overly generous salaries to company executives, where else was the money going?

It turned out that most of the money Experiment Publications was taking in had been funneled into the Gernsback owned radio and television station, WRNY, and it turned out that WRNY was an absolute money pit.

By mid and late 1920s most commercial radio stations were on a firmly profitable basis, but not WRNY. Gernsback had started the station as an outgrowth of his natural interest in radio technology, and as a publicity showcase for himself and his radio and science magazines. Beyond being a status symbol, and the first station to lead in any breaking new technology developed in the field, Gernsback wanted the station, as with most of his magazines, to educate and instruct the public in the basics of science.

Unfortunately what the public wanted was not to be lectured and instructed, it wanted to be entertained. By this time other commercial radio stations were broadcasting popular music, children’s programs, happy homemaker style shows, chatty commentaries, variety skits, plays, and comedy programs along with lots of other shows that entertained their audience. Gernsback’s radio station did precious little of that.

He had been given a chance to lease the actual radio station operations to another broadcaster seeking to establish a regional network, but had reneged on the deal at the last minute. That had resulted in a lawsuit, a legal action that was apparently settled out of court for an undisclosed amount of money. He had also passed by a chance to share programming with other stations in the immediate area, participating in a localized network as it were.

In addition, being the king of technology, the first to install and use all those brand new technological advancements in the exploding field of radio cost big money. Gernsback got great publicity in the newspapers as well as bragging rights in all his science and craft magazines, but it cost a bundle.

Then in 1928 he also launched WRNY as one of the nation’s very first television stations, with an enormous upfront cost for brand new experimental equipment, all without significantly expanding (or apparently even bothering to seek) advertising revenue. On top of all that he also owned W2XAL, a companion short wave station that broadcast uplifting education material to South America, none of which seems to have attracted advertisers. It was easy to see where all the money from Gernsback’s successful magazines had been going.

The receivers moved very rapidly to resolve the bankruptcy case, holding their first meeting on February 23rd. In order to reassure the public, and particularly magazine advertisers and distributors that Experiment Publications was going to continue operations, the first things Irving Trust did was to inject $50,000 of its own money into the firm to stabilize operations, pay employee salaries, catch up with basic utilities and make sure that the company was going to actually continue operations.

Plans were made immediately to sell off the anchor that was sinking the publishing empire, WRNY Radio & Television. Gernsback was adamantly opposed to this and he probably would have fought the action in court, but the next thing the receivers did was to order a complete change in the company board of directors. Gernsback did testify against this, but there was no question that the company had been seriously mismanaged. He, his brother Sidney and the company Secretary Irving Manheimer were forced out.

Radio expert Arthur H. Lynch was brought in as new editor-in-chief. He had been a contributor thru the years to many of the Gernsback publications, and it was felt that a radio expert was needed to handle the science magazines, particularly Radio News, which was the leading seller in the Gernsback magazine empire.

At that point the company could have been reorganized with Gernsback back in control, if he had submitted a plan that would have satisfied the court. On 20 February the Gernsback brothers were given ten days to declare their assets and offer suggestions for resolving the problems and put forward a plan to return the company to sound financial footing. This is what happens in most involuntary bankruptcy proceedings, and according to comments made by Robert Lowndes on page 280 in the Ashley book, he was informed by one of the receivers in later years that they were more than prepared to give Gernsback his magazines back, but no paperwork or plan was offered by Gernsback at all. Hugo Gernsback had decided to do something else. He told the receivers not to bother, that he had other plans.

Without any response from the Gernsback brothers to revive or salvage their company, the firm was declared officially bankrupt on 6 March 1929 and the receivers prepared to sell Experimenter Publishing as an established and ongoing concern, separated from the radio stations, with proceeds of the sales to
satisfied the outstanding secured debts. Assorted bids for Experimenter Publishing were offered and adjusted by assorted different people jockeying for the properties of the company.

For years Sam Moskowitz believed that Gernsback was sabotaged by Bennarr Macfadden so he could obtain control of Gernsback's magazines, particularly Amazing Stories. However there does not seem to be any validity for this point of view. Macfadden did make an offer for the Experimenter Publishing magazines, however Macfadden, who often went looking for troubled magazines and newspapers to revitalize, liked to buy publishing properties at fire sale prices, and the Irving Trust Company was not prepared to give away a string of successful magazines which were posting regular high monthly sales figures or the company they had just successfully reorganized.

The sales were finalized on 3 April, 1929. B. A. MacKinnon turned in the accepted bid, offering $336,000 in cash for the publishing company. The radio stations were sold for $100,000 to the Curtiss Company. WRNY remained a commercial radio station, while W2XAL short wave was used to serve the twenty-five air fields and flying schools the Curtiss Flying Service operated in New York and the adjoining states.

Irving Trust was able to pay all the secured creditors and make payment on some of the unsecured debts as well. The magazines, including Amazing Stories continued on without Hugo Gernsback, but maintaining the same editorial staff Gernsback had used. As the year wore on some of the writers and artists who had been owed money received payment, particularly those who had written material on a monthly or yearly contract basis. (Gernsback had odd methods of obtaining material for his magazines, and paying a flat monthly fee to writers he trusted to turn in a specified number of articles or stories per month was one of his favorite methods).

Meanwhile Hugo Gernsback had already decided to start a brand new company and launch a whole new set of magazines. He could escape all the accumulated debt of the Experimenter Publishing Company by allowing the company to go into true bankruptcy. He was clearly convinced that his vision, his direction, his touch was what was needed to create a successful publishing company. After all, he had a lifetime of experience and success in the magazine field to validate that opinion. Very likely he believed that a science fiction magazine needed his unique vision to make it successful. He had been the person who had single-handedly created Amazing Stories and made it work despite enormous initial difficulties. He had done it before, he could do it again. He probably imagined that Amazing Stories without his firm hand at the controls would flounder and soon disappear.

Viewing the events that followed it is likely that Gernsback had reached this decision sometime late in 1928, before the actual bankruptcy proceedings were initiated. He had a number of manuscripts originally submitted to Amazing Stories at his apartment, he also had the names and addresses of prominent authors, and he managed to obtain, by whatever means I won't speculate, the subscription list of Amazing Stories and other Experimenter Publication magazines.

He decided to launch a new science fiction magazine, titled Science Wonder Stories. At the same time, he envisioned expanding the science fiction field into new directions. While Science Wonder was being prepared, he decided to also launch Air Wonder Stories, and Scientific Detective Monthly, and create a different kind of radio magazine, one aimed specifically at technical people, radio engineers and maintenance repair types rather than hobby enthusiasts. This new technical magazine was to be titled Radio Craft.

On 23 February, 1929, the same day the receivers ousted Gernsback and the other Board of Directors from the company, he sent a letter out to the science fiction authors mentioning the bankruptcy affecting Amazing Stories and stating his intention of creating a new science fiction magazine and promising to pay "good rates" for stories on publication. He used the subscriber lists to send out a separate letter to the readers around April 2nd, declaring that he was starting a brand new monthly science fiction publication and offered advance subscriptions at a bargain charter rate of $1.50 for one year, $2.40 for two years, and $3.25 for three years.

Response was good. In 1926 Amazing Stories had fought an uphill battle getting reader commitment, with a mere 5,250 subscribers at the end of that year. But as the magazine’s popularity boomed, the subscription base went way up and by 1929 there were quite a lot of science fiction fans who wanted to read this new literature.

Ashley estimates that the subscription response for Science Wonder Stories alone raised between ten and twelve thousand dollars. A subscription offer for the second new SF magazine, Air Wonder Stores and his projected new radio technical magazine Radio Craft brought in more money. Ashley estimates that around forty thousand dollars in advance subscription money came in,
sufficient ready cash to launch his new enterprise. In addition to that Gernsback had income from several other companies he owned, companies not affected by the Experimenter Publications bankruptcy, plus he made an arrangement with the L. F. McClure, a Chicago advertising agent he had worked with previously to help secure paid ads for his new magazine titles. Advertising revenue was important to magazines that primarily relied on newsstand sales for the bulk of their circulation.

The other thing Gernsback needed was a staff. In particular he needed competent assistant editors, especially for the science fiction magazines. The current employees of the revitalized and newly sold Experimenter Publications were not going to jump ship now that their company had reformulated, yet he needed some help, fast.

He first offered the job to Stanton A. Coblentz, a good writer with a strong human touch to his stories, but Coblentz turned him down, preferring to remain a writer. In desperation Gernsback placed an advertisement in the *New York Times*. One of the applicants was a twenty-seven year old MIT graduate named David Lasser who had combined degrees in engineering and business administration. Gernsback interviewed him and hired him at a salary of $65.00 per week, a very respectable rate of pay in 1929. This turned out to be one of the best decisions Gernsback ever made. Lasser knew almost nothing about science fiction, but he was smart, determined, and dedicated, and he had a background in science so he could police the stories and keep out most of the ridiculous pseudo science Gernsback despised.

Lasser proved to be invaluable, working enthusiastically with established authors and would-be writers to turn out science adventure stories with a strong human focus and a reasonable scientific background.

The first issue of *Science Wonder Stories* hit the newsstands on Friday, 3 May 1929, with a cover date of June. This was less than ten weeks after the initial bankruptcy proceedings had been lodged against Experimenter Publications, an incredible achievement, even for Hugo Gernsback who liked to get things done as fast as possible once he made up his mind on something. Four weeks later on 3 June, the first issue of *Radio Craft* was released, and a week later the first issue of *Air Wonder Stories* came out with a cover date of July 1929. In fall came the first issue of *Science Wonder Quarterly* and in mid December Gernsback also launched *Scientific Detective Stories* with a January, 1930 cover date.

With four science fiction theme magazines issued in rapid succession Gernsback was clearly determined to dominate the science fiction field and he was also trying to put as much pressure as he could on *Amazing Stories* and *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, promising readers better stories with greater variety, and offering writers more market opportunities and faster payment.

To avoid any repeat of the involuntary bankruptcy problems that has forced him out of Experimenter Publishing, Gernsback created several separate corporations for each mini-group of magazines, and established Gernsback Publications as a holding company controlling them all. His new shield-and torch emblem appeared at the top of each magazine’s front cover.

Today science fiction fans may wonder why there was ever a science fiction magazine titled *Air Wonder Stories* in the first place. To understand this, you need to consider what was going on in the late 1920s.

Flying had stopped being a rich man’s luxury toy in World War I, and in the years following the Great War flying had become a national fad, a popular mania that caught the public’s fancy and lodged in the public imagination with the same intensity that radio, silent movies and jazz music enjoyed.

Aviation was one of the hottest topics of the decade. It seemed that every young male who could afford an airplane bought a plane and took to the skies. Those who couldn’t buy a airplane could still take lessons and learn how to fly, and if you couldn’t do that, barn stormers and local flying schools were everywhere, offering a chance to tour the skies in short jaunts for a fee, while air shows offered a chance to see airplanes and flyers right up close performing daredevil feats and thrilling races. The nation, indeed the whole world was air crazy. In 1927 Charles Lindbergh had become the first person to fly the Atlantic Ocean solo and had returned home to a bombastic welcome that made him the greatest national hero of an entire generation.

So it is not too unusual that Gernsback would link his new science fiction magazine with one of the hottest topics of the decade. The previous year while in control of Experimenter Publications he had been working on a new magazine specifically devoted to the technical side of flying. After he was forced out, the revitalized company continued with that project and produced *Aero Mechanics* in the fall of 1929 as a fifty-cent quarterly. Gernsback decided to link the public enthusiasm for aviation with the explosive popularity of science fiction, probably reasoning that
Pursuant to many inquiries from our readers, we are pleased to announce that the first issue of the SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY will be on all newsstands on September 10th. We have secured for the first issue, the American rights of a complete new novel by the famous German science fiction author, Otto Willi Gall. Far from being fantastic, this story has the very vital of reality in it. Interplanetary problems become those serious things that are part and parcel of our everyday life. You will be stunned by the truths that this powerful writer gives you. This is one of the most unusual interplanetary stories ever published. The title of the story is:

"THE SHOT INTO INFINITY."

Among the other stories are:

THE HIDDEN WORLD

By Edmund Hamilton

THE ARTIFICIAL MAN

By Lilith Ludalore

And Others.

The subscription price of the QUARTERLY is $1.75 per year, single copy 50c.

Purchasers, a special price of $1.25 per year is available now. This offer will be positively withdrawn after thirty days. Address all subscriptions to:

Stellar Publishing Corporation
90 W.S. Park Place
New York, N.Y.
science fiction fans would buy the magazine for the fantastic stories, and perhaps the air hungry public and then become enthralled with the stories they found inside.

For whatever reason the magazine was titled *Air Wonder Stories*, and every issue featured most of its science fiction related to airplanes and air travel. Not necessarily all, but at this point in time, most of the stories were science-aviation related. In addition every issue featured information pages with news of the latest developments in the field of aviation, of which there were a great number at this particular time, and the magazine also offered a technical and craft section for the more advanced air enthusiasts along with plenty of aviation related advertising.

Gernsback stressed in the editorial of the very first issue that his purpose, as in times before, was to educate while entertaining. He declared that there had been “too much pseudo science-fiction of a questionable quality in the past.” He went on to scold “over-enthusiastic authors whose stories with little scientific training have rushed into print and unconsciously misled the readers by the distortion of scientific facts to achieve results that are clearly impossible.”

This was not just a statement of a new policy, it was also a jab at *Amazing Stories*, which up till this point in time had been the only purely science fiction magazine on the market and the place where all that misleading pseudo scientific clap-trap had first appeared. They fact that Gernsback himself had been the original publisher/editor of *Amazing Stories* and had therefore certainly been the person who had been most guilty of this action might have given regular science fiction readers reason to pause.

To help keep things on a more scientific level Gernsback created a board of noted scientists for both *Air Wonder* and *Science Wonder* who would be given manuscripts to peruse and presumably pass on their scientific accuracy. Some of these science experts actually received a few stories in advance to look over, but most did not. A few who were also science fiction readers occasionally added comments (or condemnations) of the science in some of the stories thru the magazine’s letter columns.

For all of this high-minded determination and appeals to the lofty ideals of science, most of the issues that Gernsback turned out had pretty much the same fantastic mix of science and pseudo-science, or even no science at all, as his previous efforts while over at *Amazing Stories*.

The cover of this October 1929 was created by Frank R. Paul, Gernsback’s favorite science fiction artist and a perennial fan favorite as well. This is a strong cover, showing a fantastic rocket ship hurtling out at the reader thru some kind of elevated tower direction system. This scene illustrated “Through the Air Tunnel” a tale by Harl Vincent. “Science Aviation Stories” heralds the blurbs on the lower right of the cover. The authors listed, Ed Earl Repp, Harl Vincent and Henrik Dahl Juve would have been immediately familiar to regular science fiction readers. The background colors on the cover are sky blue and sea green. It was an impressive cover for the period, but not as impressive as some of the others that would be offered a few months later.

Inside the issue leads off with an editorial by Hugo Gernsback contrasting the future of aviation represented by airships and heavier than air flying planes. In actuality this point had already been pretty much settled by 1929. As beautiful and awe inspiring as zeppelins and blimps might be, the speed, maneuverability, and economic advantages of prop driven airplanes was had already clearly established itself.

Gernsback noted that lighter than air craft had a sterling safety record far exceeding the heavier than air branch, but the heavier than air vessels were clearly faster and could land at many more places than zeppelins.

What nobody knew back then was how metal fatigue worked. Those beautiful dirigibles were mostly constructed of duro-aluminum and metal fatigue would doom them all. The use of hydrogen as a buoyant material instead of the more costly helium (a gas only found in usable quantities within the confines of the continental United States, and which the USA was not disposed to sell to potential belligerents) was also a major inhibiting factor. The destruction of the German zeppelin Hindenburg in 1937 put an end to the era of lighter than air flight, yet it is significant that this disaster, grim as it was, was the only case of a commercial lighter than air ship crashing with any loss of passenger lives in more than thirty-five years of commercial airship passenger service, a safety record that stands unmatched by any other means of transportation except walking.

The stories inside all come with impressive full page illustrations contributed by Frank Paul. In addition there was a new feature. Along with each story came a realistic drawing of each author created by Walter Blythe from photographs submitted by each writer. The artwork here is realistic and generally provides an excellent likeness, altho in later years a
few authors complained that the drawings were not
good. Still, this was an innovative concept and
provided readers a chance to actually see what the
writers looked like. Most of them looked like regular
people; there were no dome headed grotesques among
them, altho a few authors submitted photos with
expressions that might best be described as a very
determined, or even downright grim.

The leadoff story in the issue is “The Sky
Maniac” by Henrik Dahl Juve and is not the story I
would have chosen to lead off this or any other
magazine. This story epitomizes everything that
critics find wrong with the early Gernsback style
science fiction story.

The writing is primitive with convoluted
sentence structure filled with awkward phrasing and
obscure adjectives that don’t fit. The dialog between
characters is extremely stilted and absolutely
unbelievable. Every few paragraphs in the story
everything stops as the protagonist inquires about the
science behind some future marvel. The plot is trivial
and ineptly handled, and to make things even worse,
the plot climaxes and winds up in a few short
paragraphs then just stops without creating a
satisfactory conclusion or summation.

This is a sequel to “The Silent Destroyer”
from the very first issue of Air Wonder, in which our
hero, Theodore A. Addison, has been capitulated from
the twentieth century forward a few centuries and has
adventures in this scientifically oriented future
civilization. The bad guy in this new story uses his
battleship of the skies to slice a pre-constructed new
science center in half as it is being hauled thru the
heavens to its permanent location.

The hero and his military friend take off in
their air battleship to capture the attacker who is
described as being an anti-science fanatic. After
locating the bad guy a short battle follows. This
poorly described stratospheric combat leaves the
hero’s ship destroyed and the entire surviving crew
captured by the maniac who plans to torture them until
they give up their belief in the wonders of science
(hey, could I make up something as stupid as that?)

But we need not despair. The twentieth
century hero pulls a hacksaw out of the tote bag that
went into the future with him, and saws thru the prison
bars. It turns out that the future civilization folks just
don’t recognize that something so primitive as a
hacksaw could ever be used as a tool or a weapon.
Addison urges the captives to overpower the bad guy
and saves the day. The End.

Bad is really too kind a word for this atrocity.
This story has so many awful points in plotting and
story development that it would take a couple of pages
just to run them all down and it certainly isn’t worth
the effort. This is the kind of story that would
instantly alienate any potential new science fiction
reader to Air Wonder Stories and might cause serious
misgivings about the entire genre from occasional
readers as well.

Henrik Dahl Juve was born in 1899 and died
in 1990. He was an electrical engineer and an early
convert to the new science fiction literature, and more
than that, he was one of the new young enthusiasts
who decided to actually write the stuff. He injected
vast amounts of speculative and real science into his
stories, which pleased Gernsback, but not necessarily
the readers. His writing efforts appeared from 1929
thru the early thirties.

I can’t find an index anywhere that lists all of
his stories. Robert Lowndes said he wrote eight
stories, but the ISFDB database lists only seven, and
neither of the two that showed up in these early Air
Wonder issues is on that list. Let’s just say he
produced at least eight stories and perhaps a dozen all
total before the field moved beyond his limited story
telling ability.

All of his stories were published in
Gernsback’s magazines. He stopped writing science
fiction entirely in 1933 when Gernsback’s financial
woes led him to stop paying his authors. Juve had a
real career and certainly didn’t need the income from
the sale of his stories, but it was a matter of principle
with him, as it was with a number of other writers
who dropped the genre at the same time for the same
reason.

Despite his obvious lack of writing skills,
Juve is remembered today because he had an uncanny
knack for actually making some astonishingly
accurate predictions among all the future scientific
mumbo jumbo he espoused. The most famous of
these happened to have been made in his very first
published story, the equally forgettable prequel tale
called “The Silent Destroyer” in which he correctly
predicted laser beams, and that they would be
primarily used not as weapons of war, but as cutting
tools in industry and for biological surgery and to
determine accurate measurements.

This wasn’t just a fluke. In the middle of this
Air Wonder story, among discussions of huge vacuum
energy plants that expel or suck energy thru the either
to create gravity void space and air ships, a hopeless
jumble of nonsense, I was reading along and suddenly
stumbled across his accurate description of a
successful wire voice recording machine.
As they watched, paralyzed, the building and air barge fell apart and hurtled toward the earth. The entire train had been split from end to end. The attacker now swung back and then darted away.
Now, wire recording technology was actually developed in the late 1890s, with some office dictaphone machines coming into use during the late 1920s. But because of many technical problems the kinks didn’t get worked out until the late 1930s. As an electrical engineer Juve may have been familiar with this system and its problems and offered a few offhand comments of his own in the course of this adventure.

But in that same section was a description of a microfilm reader, including stating that words and drawings would be printed on flexible film held on
spools, then projected either onto a screen reader, or projected onto a wall or screen across the room. In a different story he described the technology used for Polaroid instant photography, although his use for it was more as a photo-copying machine.

If Juve had possessed any kind of writing talent at all these moments of scientific precognition would have made a definite mark on the science fiction field, but alas, his story plotting is every bit as bad as his abysmal writing skills.

Despite being rapidly supplanted in the world of science fiction and generally forgotten after 1934, the Juve family issued a privately published hardback in 1984 that collecting most of the science fiction stories he had written for Gernsback. This book, titled “The Silent Destroyer: A Science Fiction Anthology” did not sell well and happens to be pretty expensive now, but you can still find copies here and there because nobody really wants to buy a volume of stories this poorly crafted.

Sam Moskowitz wrote an article in 1989 focusing on Juve’s odd moments of scientific prediction which appeared in something called Extrapolation 30.1. I don’t know what Extrapolation is, perhaps it was a specialty fanzine. I’ve never seen a copy and to the best of my knowledge that article has not been reprinted elsewhere.

There is also another little oddity involving Mr. Juve. Juve was one of the earliest of the “new” writers the Gernsback/Lasser team discovered and nurtured when their new science fiction magazines were getting started. In the Coming Next Month section printed on the contents page of this issue is the mention of another Juve story, “Streamers of Death” which was slated to appear in the upcoming November issue of Air Wonder Stories.

Except that the story did not appear there, or in any other issue of Air Wonder. It also didn’t show up in Science Wonder, or in any other Gernsback magazine, ever.

What happened? According to the promo blurb this story was to deal with the near extinction of the human race by a scientific mastermind in the future. Juve’s writing and scientific skills are described in glowing terms and the upcoming adventure was heralded as Mr. Juve’s best story ever.

One wonders what went wrong. Perhaps the adventure was retitled and showed up later in one or another of the Gernsback magazines, but a glance at the titles and themes for later Juve published material doesn’t give any clue that any of them might have been this particular bit of fiction.

On the other hand, Lasser and Gernsback were already becoming concerned about a few overused stereotypes showing up in the magazine, and the theme of scientific masterminds trying to take over the world was one of them they were trying to avoid.

The February 1930 issue carries a Juve novelette titled “The Vanishing Fleet.” Perhaps this was the missing story. I do not have that particular issue so I can’t read the adventure to make any kind of comparisons, but it seems unlikely to me that Gernsback would have changed the title of a story he had promoted so enthusiastically in an earlier issue. Still, the mystery of the vanishing Juve story is one that has never been explained. Perhaps some astute reader out there has some additional information to add that would clear up the mystery.

The second story in the issue is “Around the World In 24 Hours” by R.H. Romans, a writer who turned out very little science fiction, but made a bit of a splash in 1930 with his novel titled “The Moon Conquerors” which appeared in the Winter 1930 issue of Science Wonder Stories Quarterly. This novel was reprinted in 1940 by former Gernsback editor Charles B. Horning in the Summer issue of Science Fiction Quarterly. A follow-up adventure titled “The War of the Planets” appeared in the Summer 1930 Wonder Stories Quarterly.

This short series starred an enduring female protagonist, a beautiful girl genius (those are the best kind), and a story dealing with cosmic creation and an effort to show the error of the racial superiority concept. These two stories were well received by the readers at the time and the novel is now available as a print-on-demand trade paperback thru Creative Commons Marketplace at a twelve dollar cover price for those who might not care to invest big bucks in the original pulp magazine.

The only other science fiction story Mr. Romans ever wrote was this short piece, which is too bad because he has a natural writing style that stands
He ended by dropping his plane toward the crowd, checking its fall at an altitude of one hundred feet and remaining suspended in the air. He then dropped to a lower altitude, held the plane motionless and addressed the crowd.
in sharp contrast to many of the Gernsback regulars. This particular story is lightly humorous and deals with an eccentric inventor who has devised a clunky looking airplane, complete with an old Ford model-T motor in its nose, which he claims can fly around the world in twenty-four hours. He is willing to put up a hundred thousand dollars to prove his point, if anybody cares to give him ten to one odds.

This seemingly sure thing lures a couple of big city bookies who make up a pool and front the million bucks, and then, of course, it turns out that the eccentric inventor has developed a super airplane that runs on a completely new principle, one that needs no motor or propellers, and can cruise up to speeds as high as 24,000 miles per hour (that was not a typo---24,000 miles per hour). He whizzes from city to city, stopping at each to perform astonishing aerial feats ranging from hovering at a dead stop in mid air to corkscrew turns and loops beyond anything ever seen in conventional aircraft before.

The explanation for this miracle of the ages is provided by the inventor who turns out to actually be a famous flyer from a few years back with a serious habit of betting on slow horses. He has devised a system from studying the ‘air pocket’ phenomena and has discovered that an electrical discharge creates these odd atmospheric irregularities.

He has developed a system that can duplicate this, creating an area of near vacuum low pressure in front of his new plane and a high pressure ridge behind. He calls this Atmospheric Pressure Control and declares that the system creates and destroys the pockets of near vacuum low pressure, and when they are dispersed almost instantly the high pressure ridge behind propels the aircraft forward at extremely high speeds. Once he perfected his new flying machine, he decided to revenge himself on all the bookies who had taken his money over the years.

I don’t buy this explanation for a second, and probably neither did the readers. In the first place, even allowed that such a system would work at all, the aircraft would need some kind of massive power system to electrically generate and dissolve those artificially created ‘air pockets’ of near vacuum, and the only power source the author gives is twenty-four linked 9 volt batteries. Doesn’t seem adequate to me.

On the other hand, back when flight was new and novel, many people, including scientists were not exactly sure how heavier than air machines really worked. The air flow over a curved wing is supposed to create a low pressure area and the higher pressure below is supposed to lift the plane up into the air.

As a matter of fact, even at this late date science isn’t exactly sure how airplanes fly. There appear to be a number of unique principles involved, so the idea that high and low pressure areas could be artificially created and used to zap a plane forward at incredible speeds was no more fantastic at the time than the concept that a rocket ship using explosive fuel could somehow escape the gravitational force of the earth and reach the moon without everything blowing up or veering completely off course.

It took many years of intense effort to perfect rockets, and who knew, in 1929, but that an air pressure driven airplane might not be the next technology break-thru in heavier than air flying technology. But I’m pretty sure nobody, even the author, bought the bit that the whole thing could be flown on a few dry cell batteries.

Stepping back and looking at this objectively it was a well written and slightly amusing story, but essentially it was yet another Gernsback gadget story, a bit of fiction built around and devoted entirely to some projected marvel of future science. Gernsback had been running these things since the late teens in his technical magazines and altho this was better written than most others from the same period it still fell short of being satisfactory fiction. You know from the very minute the premise is set up what is going to happen, so the only thing the reader has to look forward to is how and why the bizarre new aircraft was designed and why the million dollar bet was proposed.

However, this yarn was a very welcome palate cleanser after that awful piece of drivel Juve wrote. In my opinion one of the best parts of this tale is the interesting artwork Frank Paul created to illustrate the story.

The follow-up is the cover story, “Through the Sky Tunnel” by Harl Vincent, a long time Gernsback regular writer who was well liked by the readers. After reading this particular piece of fiction one wonders why. This story is not well written and the story plot, what there is of it, is trivial and entirely predictable.

Jimmy Streeter is the hero who has invented a method of dramatically increasing the flying speed of the air-tunnel air liners. This air-tunnel transportation company links all parts of the world thru a series of tubes and futuristic aircraft that operate using scientific mumbo-jumbo including “etheric vibrations projected from point to point in the same manner as the regular beams over which industrial power is transmitted”. Twin tubes of these strange vibrational rays form great arcs leading from coast to coast thru
which other radio-like vibrations provide “repulsive force that neutralizes gravity, and allows the cars to remain suspended when stationary or when in motion.” The energy tubes are projected from the tops of tall metal towers. Aircraft using other energy forces and high torque propellers shoot thru the tunnels at very high speed.

Jimmy wants to marry Doris Townsend, daughter of the head of the company, but dad, as is common in such melodramas, favors oily cynical board member Ashley Hoyt who is rich and successful. To appease Papa, Doris promises to marry Ashley in thirty days, secretly hoping that if Jimmy’s new invention works Daddy will change his opinion of the young swain.

Ashley has meanwhile secretly arranged for Doris to visit a friend on the west coast so she will be away and will have no chance to see Jimmy while Ashley presses his suit. This works out well for Jimmy, who spends the time making ready the new high speed invention and preparing for the critical test.

Then, disaster strikes as Doris falls ill with a disease that is fatal if not treated in three or four hours. The only doctor who can save her is in New York, but she’s out in California. The air tubes take over six hours to reach the coast, so she’s doomed. But wait! Jimmy’s new invention might offer a glimmer of hope! If his innovative technique works the physician and the grief stricken father can be out there in a mere three hours! Will it work? Gosh, what do you think?

Contrived, clumsy, trite, and pathetic are suitable adjective for this bit of fiction. As I was reading this I wondered why the Doc couldn’t just pick up a telephone and call the west coast and give them directions on preparing the life saving serum, or why his work and techniques in fighting this mysterious almost always fatal fast moving fictional illness hadn’t been published in some recognized medical journal so everybody would already know how to deal with it. Doctors usually don’t keep their life saving secrets to themselves, and even greedy doctors figure out ways to profit from their discoveries by making them widely available thru patented drugs and devices.

But not in Vincent’s tale. That would have been too easy, so instead we have this unbelievable series of events that allow the hero to not only successfully demonstrate his new invention, but to get himself into the good graces of Doris’ Dad. The whole plot is so simplistic a six year old child would have found it boring.

More than that I wonder why Gernsback ever bought this story in the first place. Not only was the plot absolutely lame but the story embodied every facet of ludicrous pseudo-science that he continually preached against. Vincent tells us that the air tubes work by creating anti-gravity, that his hero’s new system somehow uses “R energy” to remove 24 million cubic feet of air from inside the tube, then super speed is achieved by adjusting the vibration rate of “S Energy”. “Q energy forces” will then push the car along at blinding speeds.

This isn’t science, it’s magic by the alphabet, pure wish fulfillment using concepts invented on the spot. There is no connection with reality and even the idea that a vacuum ride in the energy tube will somehow eliminate all friction is highly suspect. Surely this wasn’t what Gernsback was seeking when he editorialized about the need for solid science and careful story structure in science fiction.

“He that saddles a horse is no horseman” was the pen name of Harold Vincent Schoepflin. He was a mechanical engineer, another of those bright young men attracted to the brand new world of science fiction who decided to try and write science fiction as well as just read it. His first story, “the Golden Girl of Muran” appeared in the June 1928 issue of Amazing Stories.

He had quite a few stories published in the field, over seventy, and unlike some other Gernsback writers, his writing style and plotting abilities actually improved over the years. Unfortunately they hadn’t improved very much at this point in time, but in later years he had material published in all the top science fiction magazines and even sold work to Argosy, a prestige high circulation title. His output stopped in the early 1940s due to his employment with Westinghouse on war related projects, but he remained an active life-long science fiction fan.

When he moved to the west coast later in life he joined the LASFS and the Count Dracula Society and attended science fiction conventions where he was very accessible to fans. In the early sixties he returned to writing, turning out a novel, “The Doomsday Planet” in 1966 and a story for If before dying in 1968 at age seventy-five. Today a number of his stories have been placed on the Project Guttenberg website and can be read for free or downloaded for free.

This particular story has not been placed online and it does nothing to enhance his reputation, but alas, there is worse to come.

Vincent’s trivial tale is followed by “The Air Spy”, written by Edward Lee Harrison which is a story that is basically pointless. A spy working for “Euravia” has been exposed. He phones his wife to
Lifted clear of the great vessel, the little device with its human freight swung far astern in the fierce rush of the air. The passenger’s whole attention was riveted on the black craft below.
let her know the jig is up, and makes his getaway from the roof of the Aero Club in his personal flying yacht, the ‘Pegasus’. US Naval Commander Holder gets a message altering him about the spy and is told to take to the air in the Aerial Patrol cruiser ‘Petrel’ and capture the traitor. Unfortunately the spy’s ship has a pretty good lead.

Meanwhile the spy’s wife hustles over to the run down farm of a confederate who has devised a new kind of experimental speed flyer (that is never explained or even described). She and the eccentric inventor, who speaks with a heavy German accent, take off to save her hubby.

The race flashes across the ocean. Interestingly enuf the huge prop-driven US air cruiser shakes and groans as it reaches high speed. I sure wouldn’t want to be caught in an official military aircraft that shakes and vibrates and creaks when it flies at the highest approved cruising speed. Perhaps some Inspector General’s office of the far future ought to take a close look at those military construction contracts.

In an apparent direct inspiration to Gene Roddenberry and the Star Trek TV series, Commander Holder calls down to the engine room and demands that his stoic engineer produce even more speed despite the very real danger that the propeller rotations will not match and the main shafts will snap, and in any event the ship may shake itself to pieces anyway.

When the ‘Petrel’ finally locates the ‘Pegasus’ Holder’s men board the spy’s ship but a careful search turns up nothing. Holder measures the ship and locates a few feet of unaccounted for space, which he discovers contains a drop hole to the outside of the vessel, with a dangling ladder hanging down.

And the climax to all this action? There is none. The spy and his wife get away clean in her super fast mini-ship that the old German fifth-columnist had devised. Holder and the crew of the ‘Petrel’ limp back to port with their vessel in need of serious repairs while the spy’s ship is released to continue on its merry way. We learn later the spy is now living quietly in a forest cottage in central Europe, while his flying ship was deliberately crashed off the Atlantic coast. The last sentences say that “Von Holst and his devoted wife are living their uneventful lives in a peaceful close. The threatened war was averted by the great meeting of The Hague, and peace rules the world once more.”

What a let down! What was the point of this story? Its connection with science fiction is so trivial as to be virtually non-existent. Gernsback must have been desperate for short stories to have ever accepted this piece of crap for publication. The only good thing I can say about it is that it was the one and only story Harrison ever sold to a science fiction magazine, but even this one was too many.

This issue also contains the fourth and concluding part of a serial “The Ark of the Covenant”, by Victor MacClure which had started in the first number of Air Wonder. Victor MacClure was a moderately popular British author most famous for writing “She Stands Accused” a look at notorious female criminals, a work with strong feminist overtones despite its title and lurid subject matter. He is also known as the writer of a series of conventional murder mysteries along with play reviews, but his wide interests also led him to produce a book of elocution and one about Norwegian air pilots in WWII.

So far as is known this was the only work of science fiction he ever wrote. It was originally published in the UK back in 1924 under the title “Ultimatum”. Harper & Brothers issued the American edition of the volume later in 1924 under the title “Ark of the Covenant”.

The novel made a strong impression on Gernback who secured the American magazine reprint rights and ran it as a serial in The Experimenter beginning with the November 1924 issue. The Experimenter was a name change and continuation of another Gernback science magazine titled Practical Electronics that had begun in 1921. Readers had to wait a long time to finish this serial the first time out. The story ran thru 15 separate monthly issues and finally concluded in the January 1926 number, which was also the final issue of The Experimenter.

The subtitle of the novel: ‘A Romance of The Air and of Science’ made it a natural for Air Wonder Stories, particularly since most readers probably had not read the original magazine serialization or been able to afford the Harper’s hardback edition.

This is a story of scientific pacifists who seek world disarmament and an end to all warfare. They are equipped with huge Dirigibles, force fields, a ray that transmutes elements, flame rays, and atomic power. All these goodies were invented by The Chief, the dying American master of the group.

At first his efforts and his organization The League of the Covenant appear to be clever air pirates or anarchists. The hero of the story is a flyer and his adventures trying to battle and locate the group form the bulk of the story plot. The Chief of the group manages to finally convert the American President
The Ark of the Covenant
by Victor MacClure

A gout of flame shot up from the rise beyond the cemetery and a vast plume of smoke, at the root of which buildings seemed to part—crust and shattered. The airship shook to a tremendous report.

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to his way of thinking and after destruction rains down everywhere in this final section of the book the world finally embraces peace, with co-existence among all peoples becoming reality. The title derives from the name of the chief’s airship, which he calls the Ark of the Covenant from its obvious Biblical references.

These kinds of peacemaker/wish fulfillment SF adventures have been around for a long time, predating the twentieth century and they continue to be published even today, altho they are rarer in recent times and the more modern treatments of the theme tend to have stronger religious underpinnings.

In older days it was generally believed that cartels of international munitions dealers or industrialists controlling heavy industry were responsible for many of the wars on the planet. Deluded patriots, ambitious generals and power mad lunatics were the other forces much of the public felt were responsible for the ceaseless wars that have plagued the human race.

On the other hand, it was French Marshal Ferdinand Foch who once remarked that he was not sure whether periods of war interrupting times of peace was the natural state of civilization, or if war was the natural human condition interrupted by short periods of peace.

The human race has been fighting wars forever, even before civilizations were created. Tribes, religious sects, families, clans, all were waging war before the first kingdom or the first nation was ever established. War breaks out for good or bad reasons or sometimes apparently for no reason at all. Altho most people would prefer not to have warfare, it seems unlikely that any group or faction, even one headed by a dedicated idealist armed with super scientific weapons and a worldwide organization willing to use them could ever insure the peaceful co-existence of the human race. I wish it were otherwise, but basic human nature does not change and the entirety of human history seems to bear out my supposition.

This novel also has a modest but intense amount of the fantastic scientific speculation that Gernsback loved. The giant dirigibles are filled with “aithon” a gas that is lighter than hydrogen, but is also non-combustible. This mystery element is composed of sub-atomic particles, which make it lighter than hydrogen. There is a long rambling discourse on the nature of atomic structure and the existence of sub-atomic particles, and how The Chief is able to use atomic energy to rapidly transmute metals, mostly valuable ones down into relatively worthless ones like lead.

Atomic energy as an explosive potential weapon is discussed. Some of this stuff is interesting, but most of it is mind numbingly boring. MacClure had done as much reading as was necessary to figure out that the business of the “ether”, a concept much in use in the first third of the twentieth century, and the nature of light rays made no real sense and used this as a springboard to incorporate his own speculations with theories he had probably picked up from newspaper science stories and popular technical magazines of the day.

This particular adventure happens to be well written. MacClure was an accomplished author who knew how to use the language, and altho super-science and the wonders of the future were not his main line of work, he does a good job with this novel. Gernsback’s policy was to run serials in all of his science fiction magazines to help develop reader loyalty and he did well to present this novel in Air Wonder.

Following the serial we find “The Invisible Raiders” by Ed Earl Repp. Repp was originally a newspaper reporter and a publicity writer who took the advice of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Zane Grey and started writing for the pulp magazines. Science fiction was his first love, and he turned out a lot of science fiction in the early years starting in 1929 with the publication of his novel “The Radium Pool” which was serialized beginning in the August issue of Science Wonder Stories.

However the field moved faster than Repp could keep up. His gosh-wow approach to the wonders of science was fully in tune with the young fans who were blown away by this new literature, but his skill at creating acceptable science and innovative plots could not keep up with the rapidly evolving field.

He began to write westerns, and in 1934 wrote his first western screen play. Writing western movies was a lot more profitable than writing science fiction, especially since he continued to turn out western novels and novelettes at the same time. In the fifties he wrote for such TV western programs as “26 Men”, “Broken Arrow” and “Tales of the Texas Rangers”.

Altho westerns were paying the way, particularly screen westerns, he continued to turn out science fiction stories all the way up thru at least 1950. Several of his early serials including “The Radium Pool” and “The Stellar Missiles” came out in hardback, and both are due to be reissued in hardback again today. He also created a scientist detective,
John Hale, whose stories were well liked. He was an enthusiastic

"Look at the screen!" Colonel Brigham shouted savagely to the professor and pointing to the screen. "The thieves are at work on the Jupiter and not a single federal craft is in sight."
British had the best and earliest success in finally of each other in secret to perfect the system. The dozen different nations were working independently early 1930s with international tensions heating up, a timed and its distance accurately determined. By the Repp postulates, but they did give a blip that could be primarily using radio waves.

Continued to be made thru the early twentieth century, and new technologies tweaking these systems distant objects hidden by clouds or fog was first magnetic rays, whether visible light or radio to detect well known radar process. The properties of electro is caught by his apparatus and shown on a screen. to the human eye, and the reflection back of those rays behind cloud or fog or rain, even if they are invisible scale he is able to locate and zero in on any objects adjusting the frequency of the rays up and down the The scientist uses infrared light waves and by the process was stolen last year from an oriental scientist tells the officers of the aero police that the invisibility proceeds to fill out the rest of the story. The scientist from Romans' adventure.

Remarkably to me the scientific explanation for this isn't too far outside the realm of probability. The scientist uses infrared light waves and by adjusting the frequency of the rays up and down the scale he is able to locate and zero in on any objects behind cloud or fog or rain, even if they are invisible to the human eye, and the reflection back of those rays is caught by his apparatus and shown on a screen. This is pretty close to the actual technique used by modern infrared imaging and akin to the more well known radar process. The properties of electromagnetic rays, whether visible light or radio to detect distant objects hidden by clouds or fog was first developed in the late 1800s. Assorted improvements and new technologies tweaking these systems continued to be made thru the early twentieth century, primarily using radio waves.

Radio waves didn’t produce the clear picture Repp postulates, but they did give a blip that could be timed and its distance accurately determined. By the early 1930s with international tensions heating up, a dozen different nations were working independently of each other in secret to perfect the system. The British had the best and earliest success in finally developing the current radar system but as time went on infrared technology has surpassed the radar and sonar systems.

Today infrared imaging is used by both military and civilian authorities for homing and tracking of objects, as night vision, target zeroing, thermal efficiency analysis, weather forecasting, telecommunication, ecological mapping and much more. So far as I’m concerned Repp’s excursion into the infrared detection of hidden or invisible objects ought to rank up there in the annals of science fiction prediction at least a highly as Henrik Dahl Juve’s comments about laser beams and other future technological developments.

To make the process more interesting Repp also speculated on how an invisible paint compound might be created, theorizing that a special enamel thru which low level electric current was run might project very low frequency infrared light rays, rays that are below the spectrum of light visible by the human eye and thus the object coated with this enamel would be completely invisible to human beings. This kind of speculation even if it ignores some of the very real dangers and heat properties of infrared light strikes me as being considerably more workable than, say, the wild magical pseudo science Vincent used in his story, or even the vacuum high pressure pulsating air craft from Romans’ adventure.

Having once established his premise Repp proceeds to fill out the rest of the story. The scientist tells the officers of the aero police that the invisibility process was stolen last year from an oriental scientist and speculates that the leader of the raiders is a highly intelligent man who is using his air pirates as practice to see if his invisible crime team can function well so he can then use them later to make a major haul, perhaps a strike against the US treasury or some other major storehouse of wealth.

Needless to say the detection device is built and installed in stations along the major air route and in the Aero Patrol fighting planes. The device detects the flying pirates and in fast action the hero and his aerial patrolmen wipe up the bad guys and all ends well.

Plot-wise the primary flaw with this adventure is the entire sky piracy concept, a theme which was much beloved by early science fiction writers who also delighted in stories of space piracy. In point of fact piracy in the air or in space is unlikely to ever become a workable crime category. For airplanes it is easier to steal cargos while the craft are on the ground, avoiding lots of expense and hassles, not to mention
some of these naively optimistic future predictions from the twenties and thirties had actually come true?

But of course, not everything is entirely well in this bright future world. The skies above the city are a series of crowded but orderly thoroughfares of aircraft moving back and forth. At the extreme upper level, the 5,000 meter zone, our very young hero Arnld Benning is an air official making sure the highest priority lanes are kept clear and running efficiently, especially keeping joy riders and young speed demons out of those lanes.

But some unmarked planes approach. He snares them in a freeze-locking ray, but when one of the flyers informs him he has an urgent message, Arnld allows him onto his plane. Imagine his surprise when he sees not a man, but several big robots who proceed to knock him out and kidnap him.

The strange airplanes then proceed to bomb the center of New York City causing three million deaths and a vast amount of destruction.

It turns out that the master of this mayhem is Hyle L. Benning, Arnld’s uncle, an outlawed scientist who opposes democracy or any other form of republican government and has decided to make himself ruler of the world using his robot armies and his superior technology. He has been working on mass robot control since 1937, was branded an outlaw in 1950 and then exiled to a prison island out in the middle of the ocean, but now he’s back, ready to destroy civilization and make himself supreme dictator.

However, he’s also an old guy now and he wants someone to carry on after he finishes wiping out the decadent republics, and he has chosen his nephew as his successor, even tho they have never met. He has created two artificial islands not known to the authorities, where he has manufactured his mechanical warriors and where he has carried young Arnld. The madman’s persuasive techniques are a bit extreme. He tells Arnld that he must accept his terms or be killed on the spot.

Arnld is naturally opposed to all this nonsense, and thru a contrived bit of action manages to escape the compound and leaps into the cold ocean waters. Uncle Hyle thinks he has committed suicide, but our hero returns, gets into the building again, proceeds to knock him out and kidnap him.

Set in the far distant future of 1965, Mr. Beckwith paints a world of peace, prosperity, order and science, with human cities, particularly New York City, a quiet, clean metropolis with almost no noise, since all industry has been banished to underground factories, while pollution and sound suppressing devices keep the streets as quiet and peaceful as a meadow countryside. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if

the real dangers of trying to intercept and board flying machines traveling at high speeds in mid air.

Barring some astonishing leaps in both the detection and maneuverability of space craft, piracy in space would also be so dangerous and prohibitively expensive that it is unlikely to ever become reality, altho I suppose only time will tell if my skepticism rings true.

There is one obvious error in the story that was not noticed by either the author or the editors. Repp has his intercontinental liners build of monstrous size, big enuf so that the small air pirate planes can actually land on its wings. But these air transports, indeed all the airplanes in this story are propeller driven. Even at this point in time it was obvious that unless there was some dramatic change in the structural material used to build airplane hulls that there was an upper limit to the size and weight of a plane that could be driven purely by propellers. The amount of fuel needed to keep a prop driven plane that large aloft would also be enormous.

Altho the phrasing and plot construction of this story is crude by modern standards, it was several notches above the literary standards found in most science fiction magazines of the period. Had Repp managed to maintain the same standards of ingenuity and writing displayed here he could have continued to be a science fiction leader, but as noted, the science fiction field moved too quickly for him to keep up with, plus, writing westerns and screen plays was much more profitable.

But I think the fact that he continued to write and read science fiction for most of the rest of his life is significant. And the fact that he is primarily remembered after all these years as a science fiction writer is even more significant and speaks to the enduring loyalty of the fans of this literature.

The final piece of fiction in the issue is “The Robot Master” by O. Beckwith. Very little is known about Mr. Beckwith except that he often went under the name O. L. Beckwith. He was a young man judging by his picture with this story and most, if not all of his few science fiction stories appeared in the Gernsback magazines of this period.

Set in the far distant future of 1965, Mr. Beckwith paints a world of peace, prosperity, order and science, with human cities, particularly New York City, a quiet, clean metropolis with almost no noise, since all industry has been banished to underground factories, while pollution and sound suppressing devices keep the streets as quiet and peaceful as a meadow countryside. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if
are nowhere near the level of plotting sophistication one would expect from a magazine aimed at mature readers.

Of course, those are the key words: mature readers. How many grown-ups were actually reading this new science fiction stuff back in 1929? In point of fact most of the readers were very young males in their teens or early twenties. Compared to the material being presented in the other SF magazines, or even in this particular issue of *Air Wonder Stories*, this adventure stands up well.

Somewhat similar thrillers starring eager young heroes showed up regularly in the boy’s paper *Scoops* which came out a few years later over in Britain. Unfortunately their reader focus aiming specifically at a juvenile audience was too narrow and that magazine folded after twenty weekly issues in 1934.

Whenever I read one of these stories about would-be world conquerors, either in prose or comic book form, I always wonder how the hell these lunatics got the money and resources to build their super-science machinery and world destroying scientific processes. It was comics fan Al Kuhfeld back in the 1960s who once remarked that if he had the money to build one of those giant destructive crime machines from *Blackhawk Comics* he would just take the dough and invest in a political career and really clean up.

Politics not only offers power and prestige, but it also comes with an infinite opportunity for bribes, graft, insider information, kick-backs and other much simpler methods of getting rich than overpowering all the governments on the planet.

Then, even assuming the bad guy did manage to conquer the world, what would he do with it anyway? Most of these loony-tunes characters usually don’t have a political agenda, all they have is an ego problem and a desire to stomp on the good guys.

Beckwith wrote a few other adventures for *Science Wonder Stories*, and *Scientific Detective*, but his writing career was quite brief.

Looking over the advertising in this issue we come across a couple of uniquely Gernsbackian entries. The most notable was the full page ad for the new series of ‘Science Fiction Books’, altho they were more properly booklets. These were a series of 6x8”, 24 page saddle stitched booklets featuring either one long story or two short stories per book. Each came with an excellent black and white cover illustration done by Frank Paul. There were six books offered, and readers could buy any five for fifty cents, or all six for sixty cents, sent post paid. No fewer than five books would be shipped at any one time, and the books were offered for the first time in the October issues of both *Air Wonder* and *Science Wonder*.

For science fiction fans who couldn’t get enuf of their favorite literature this was a tempting offer, even tho it wasn’t really much of a bargain. Each of the books contained eight to ten thousand words of story, so a set of five would amount to between forty and fifty thousand words. Any issue of the three monthly Gernsback science fiction magazines sold for twenty-five cents and offered eighty thousand words; a lot more reading at half the price.

But the lure of the new and diverse was very strong, and the books sold well, mostly in units of six. Five for fifty cents was tempting, but all six for a mere extra dime was an inducement that sealed the deal for many enthusiastic fans. This series was so successful that a second set was offered in the spring of 1930.

Most, if not all of this first group of stories came from that batch of manuscripts Gernsback had at his apartment when the original bankruptcy proceedings were launched. In later years Jack Williamson, the co-author of one of these booklets, related that Gernsback offered him and co-author
NEW SCIENCE FICTION SERIES

Brand New Series

We are presenting to our readers the first six numbers of our new Science Fiction Series. These small books, illustrated by artist Paul, are printed on a good grade of paper and are sold at a low price, due to the large number per box. New ones will be issued from time to time.

REMEMBER THESE ARE BRAND NEW STORIES AND HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED BEFORE IN ANY MAGAZINE—THEY CAN ONLY BE OBTAINED THROUGH THE SCIENCE FICTION SERIES.

Every book contains two or more stories by a well-known science fiction author. The type is large and well-readable, and the size of each book is 2½ x 4½, which makes it convenient to carry on your pocket.

Below you will find a list of the first six books. Your choice of five books for 50c or the entire six books for 60c prepaid. Not less than five books sold.

1. THE GIRL FROM MARS
   By Jack Williamson and Miles J. Breuer
   Suppose some one from another planet landed on our earth. What would happen? "The Girl from Mars" is an adventure of a Martian visitor, with all the strange situations that one can imagine in such an event.

2. THE THOUGHT PROJECTOR
   By David H. Keller, M.D.
   The power of suggestion on the human mind forms the basis of "The Thought Projector." Ideas repeated over and over exert a great force on us. They penetrate our minds and give us ideas that we often think are our own.

3. AN ADVENTURE IN VENUS
   By H. F. Bohnom
   Aviation five hundred to a thousand years hence will probably be something beyond what our present conceptions. Journeys to other planets may well become commonplace as it does in the present story.

4. WHEN THE SUN WENT OUT
   By Leslie Stone
   The sun is said to be slowly cooling, and generations may thousands of years hence must bear the problem of how their heat and light is to be provided when the sun's day is done. In this, thrilling story, Leslie Stone answers that question.

5. THE BRAIN OF THE PLANET
   By Lilith Lorra
   If a super-intelligence could have its wisdom poured into our brains, what a different world we might have. Miss Lorra in "The Brain of the Planet" finds a problem and works out the answer in an astounding manner.

6. WHEN THE MOON FELL
   By Charles E. Colladay
   Collisions between celestial bodies of any size have not occurred within historical times. But such an event is not impossible. In fact many astronomers believe that our solar system came into being by such a collision. Suppose the moon were to crash into the earth. What would happen?

STEMMUS PUBLISHING CO.,
151 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y.
Enclose 1.00 for any 6 books.

THE GIRL FROM MARS
THE THOUGHT PROJECTOR
AN ADVENTURE IN VENUS
WHEN THE SUN WENT OUT
THE BRAIN OF THE PLANET
WHEN THE MOON FELL

Name ____________________________
Address __________________________
City ____________________________ State ____________
Miles J. Breuer a penny a word for that story, more than double what Amazing Stories would have paid. Gernsback clearly had no trouble finding material to fill these books, or the series that followed.

This series seems to have been reprinted continuously over the next few years, but for some reason the artwork on the front covers was dropped. The second series and a third series that came out in 1932 used plain white covers with a border, block letter titles and the Gernsback company emblem underneath the titles. Numbers were assigned to each booklet, presumably to link them together and make them more collectable, with a total of eighteen being produced.

Sales on these booklets were apparently good, yet in all my years of collecting science fiction I’ve never run across any of these items. I’ve never seen copies in anybody else’s collection either, and altho there may have been some dealers somewhere offering them for sale in the distant past, I sure don’t remember any dealer or convention huckster selling them within the past fifteen or twenty years. It seems unlikely that all those copies would have disappeared, especially the initial run of the books that carried those great cover illustrations, but I haven’t seen any.

Another interesting ad if you were a science fiction fan came at the bottom of page 321 where it was mentioned that Stellar Publications had back copies of every issue so far published of Science Wonder Stories still available at the original newsstand cover price and sent post paid to anyone who ordered them direct from Stellar. This ad was changed slightly in later issues, as the available supply of back issues diminished at a steady rate.

There were other ads for some of the Gernsback educational books, and of course plenty of aviation related ads, including a full page promo to build a career in aviation, by mail, mind you. The number of pages of advertising seems greater to me than found in competing pulp or bedsheet sized magazine. Clearly those companies that sold their products thru the mails had confidence in the new wave of Gernsback science fiction publications.

The letter column offers lots of reader input in very small type, but there is nothing particularly interesting there. Most of the readers were young and enthusiastic, either rating their favorite stories top to bottom or adding a phrase or two about something they liked (which was almost everything) or a note of disapproval for anything they did not like (very few stories met disapproval). A couple of readers opposed serials or preferred that serials run in two parts and not be strung out over many monthly issues. There was also some discussion of aviation and the aero science in the stories. Scientific debate had practically been a trademark in most of the Amazing Stories letter columns and Gernsback clearly wanted to keep that tradition going in his new mags.

There are a few curious entries here, including a long letter from some character who claims he has invented and patented a giant flying vessel with top mounted rotor-blade masts exactly like one of the vehicles from the old Frank Reade dime novel series. The editor, probably David Lasser, is genial and diplomatically cordial to all letter writers including even this nut case.

Despite the enthusiasm displayed by fans and the encouraging sales response to Air Wonder Gernsback was not entirely satisfied with the way the magazine was shaping up. By the latter part of 1929 Gernsback and Lasser had made a decision to expand the range of the story content beyond future aviation. They wanted the stories to become more science fictional, in particular they wanted more interstellar space stories. In late 1929 Lasser sent out a letter to regular contributors specifically asking for interstellar stories. After competition in the field heated up during 1930 the search for more action oriented material became urgent.

In late January 1930 Lasser and Gernsback sent out a sharp letter to their regular writers addressing what they believed were pre-conceived notions about the kind of material Air Wonder was running. They blamed the authors for stereotyping the magazines fiction into three categories---

1. stories about air bandits in the future
2. men who want to take over the world for some reason
3. stories of aerial warfare, primarily the yellow race against the white race

Gernsback said that the readers had begun to feel the magazine’s fiction was only “Wild West stories of the future.” He emphasized the need for characterization and a broader scope in plotting. But it was clear that the popularity of Astounding and the reader response to the action oriented stories in the anthology pulps were affecting the kind of material he was now seeking to print.

Gernsback got what he wanted, beginning with a two part thriller by Edmond Hamilton featuring flying cities in monumental battle. “Cities in the Air” ran as a two part serial beginning in the November 1929 issue. More interplanetary stories slipped in by other authors, yet the slogan displayed on the front cover—‘Stories of Future Aviation’, rarely changed,
even as the inside material became clearly less linked to planet Earth.

Covers for most of the later issues became much more fantastic, with space ships, flying cities, and scenes of destruction the common themes. The April 1930 number was the most graphic, showing a flying buzz-saw space craft slicing a couple of convention monoplanes to pieces. In contrast the final issue of the magazine, May 1930, hardly looked science fictional at all. A man dressed in contemporary flying togs wearing goggles is parachuting down into what appear to be an aurora of green lights. The cover made the issue look a lot like a regular aviation pulp fiction magazine. Maybe that was the intention.

Air Wonder Stories only lasted eleven issues before it was folded into Science Wonder Stories in the summer of 1930, a surprise move to most of the readers of the Gernsback periodicals. Plans had been made to continue the title, but in one of Gernsback’s sudden spur of the moment decisions, the magazine was combined with the June 1930 Science Wonder Stories, which, with that very same issue dropped the “science” part of its title and became just Wonder Stories. At the same time Scientific Detective Stories changed its name to Amazing Detective Stories.

What had happened?

Actually, quite a lot of things had happened in the world of science fiction by the middle of 1930. First, other publishers had taken notice of the genre. Clayton Publications had entered the science fiction field with Astounding Stories of Super Science whose first issue hit the newsstands dated January 1930. This was a pulp sized magazine that presented lots of adventure styled SF which appealed directly to the younger reader and by vent of offering good rates and prompt payment on acceptance they were also to feature accomplished pulpsmiths like Murray Leinster, Victor Rousseau, Ray Cummings, and Ralph Milne Farley, the same professionals that Gernsback’s half penny a word rate (paid only on publication) could not attract. In addition Harold Hersey had announced plans to produce a science fiction magazine, altho his entry into the field, Miracle Science and Fantasy didn’t actually appear until the following spring, with a cover dated April-May 1931.

Amazing Stories and Amazing Stories Quarterly were still coming out regularly with fatter issues than the Gernsback magazines offered, and meanwhile competition elsewhere had heated up. Weird Tales continued to regularly publish science fiction stories in most of their issues, including headlining their most popular SF writer Edmond Hamilton, an author whose work also appeared in the Gernsback titles.

Argosy had rediscovered science fiction and in 1930 was offered science fiction serials and novelettes in abundance. The writing style of the Argosy writers was considerably more polished and literate than that being offered by any of the science fiction magazines, and their adventure stories were both fast moving and tightly plotted, written by very popular writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Abraham Merritt, and Otis Adelbert Kline as well as Cummings, Leinster and Farley. When you add in other science fiction stories from magazines such as Blue Book, Popular Magazine, Top Notch and the other anthology pulps the field had suddenly become very crowded and extremely competitive.

The field of fantastic literature was clearly over supplied with material, offering more reading matter than even a dedicated fan could hope to buy, much less actually find the time to read.

Not only was competition intense, but a new type of science fiction was sweeping the field—the super science story. Initially popularized by Edmond Hamilton and E. E. “Doc” Smith, this branch of science fiction had suddenly come into its own, with new practitioners like John Campbell Jr., jumping into
the arena with both feet, and plenty of other authors willing to follow. Altho he published some of these adventures, this was an area of pseudo-science which Gernsback was not really interested in exploring, but his readers, a considerably number of whom were in their teen years, certainly were.

All this added competition invariably meant that sales on some magazines were going to decline. As the publisher of four science fiction magazines alone, Gernsback’s titles began to see some losses in circulation.

But beyond that and probably more directly, Gernsback was rethinking his earlier decision while he had been running Experimenter Publishing to produce an aviation science magazine, and he finally got around to doing something about it.

Gernsback clearly believed that he could attract and hold the aviation public’s attention more readily with a popular science magazine devoted to the field. The easiest way to make room for this new magazine was to replace one of his existing titles with the new one, and this is exactly what happened. The first issue of Aviation Mechanics appeared in June 1930 as a replacement title for Air Wonder Stories.

Maybe the sales of Air Wonder had suffered with all the competitive pressure, but it was also likely that Gernsback decided that the very concept of Air Wonder stories had been an unwise decision. At this point the smartest decision would have been to change the name and make it clear that the magazine was a straight science fiction publication. An even more workable solution would have been to change both Science Wonder and Air Wonder to a bi-monthly schedule. This would have allowed each magazine an extra month of exposure on the newsstands and still would have kept a new issue of each major Gernsback science fiction title appearing every month.

But that concept was apparently never even considered. Even tho he was offering a better variety of pure science fiction in his magazines, the high-adventure pulp style stories offered by Astounding, Argosy and Weird Tales were clearly the top sellers and Gernsback was probably also worried about the over saturation of this very young genre.

He had correctly estimated that the same readers who bought Science Wonder were also buying Air Wonder every month, so merging the two magazines would not result in a boost in circulation to the retitled Wonder Stories. He and Lasser later estimated that Wonder Stories gained perhaps a thousand extra sales per month, and that small increase might have been due to the more exciting and bizarre covers Paul was turning out for the magazine.

A problem that he probably did not foresee was that the new science aviation journal might not sell as well as he had anticipated, but that’s exactly what did happen. Aviation Mechanics did not take up the slack from the cancellation of Air Wonder and only lasted a single year before Gernsback killed it off with the July-Aug 1931 issue. There were already other popular aviation magazines on the stands, so his new mag had entered a crowded field at a bad time.

Gernsback immediately prepared a new science magazine to replace it. Since radio was properly launched and the field was pretty well developed, he produced another specialty hobbyist magazine called Television News which hit the newsstands with a March-April 1931 cover date.

By the end of the year other forces were also beginning to make themselves felt. The initial stock market crash in late October 1929 had not created much of an effect except among speculators and margin stock gamblers. But as the months wore on, the problems created by the crash, particularly business contraction, the short money supply, a blossoming international trade war and rising unemployment suddenly exploded in mid 1930 to become the Great Depression, and this one was a lot worse than anyone could imagine.

What was going to happen to the infant genre of science fiction when money got tight? By 1931 sales slumped across the board, that’s what happened. And yet the boom still extended into 1931, with several new fantasy magazines added to the mix. Clayton produced a direct competitor to Weird Tales with the first issue of Strange Tales appearing in September 1931. An independent publisher, Shade Publishing out of Philadelphia offered Mind Magic in June 1931, and the rush of science fiction and weird stories continued to appear in the anthology pulps, but a lot of this activity was inertia and the result of decisions that had been enacted many months earlier.

There were darker signs on the horizon in 1931, and not just a general shrinking of sales on all the science fiction titles.

B. A. MacKinnon, who had bought Experimenter Publications in 1929 took on a partner, H.K. Fly, and changed the name of the company in September 1930 to Radio-Science Publications. Staff was chopped back and some magazines were axed or reformatted. One of Gernsback’s old employees, H. Windfield Secor had been dropped and took the opportunity to move back over to the Gernsback fold.

Despite these changes Radio-Science Publications was far from stable. H.K. Fly was a book publisher whose interest in the magazine business was
minimal, at best. Early in 1931 they decided to sell parts of the company off, and then eventually, all the company. The radio ID/call letters magazine was gone by this time, as was that bright new aviation quarterly *Aero Mechanics*. Sales on the rest of the magazine line were also in decline by the time MacKinnon went shopping for buyers.

Suddenly Bennarr Macfadden got those fire sale prices he liked. W. Z. Schafer was the official buyer, who reorganized the company in August 1931 thru his Teck Publications brand, which just happened to be a subsidiary of Macfadden Publications. *Your Body* came with the deal, but it was canceled immediately since Macfadden already had his premier flagship title *Physical Culture* and didn't need a competitor.

Other Experimenter Publication titles had sputtered and had eventually died as well. Without Gernsback’s unique, not to say esoteric hand at the helm, *Science and Invention*’s circulation had slipped dramatically but it still had a reputation and a solid subscription list, so the mag was sold to the same Chicago outfit that produced *Popular Mechanics*, which promptly folded it into their main title.

Gernsback’s original company without him at its head had not fared well. *Amazing Stories, Amazing Stories Quarterly* and *Radio News*, were eventually all that was left, and as the new decade wore on, they faced production problems and steadily declining circulations as well.

By the fall of 1931 the boom was definitely over. The good times were being swept away by the dark winds of the national Depression and science fiction was about to undergo the most perilous period of its existence.

Back in 1929 Gernsback had tried to expand science fiction by stretching it into new areas: fantastic future aviation, scientific detective stories. Unfortunately the times weren’t right. Some might say the times were never going to be right, that science fiction is unique unto itself, that while fantastic aviation adventures or a future SF detective story might be incorporated into the mantel of science fiction literature itself, that there is little room for separate sub-categories in such fields, at least sub-categories that could be financially sustained.

Maybe that was true back in 1929 and 1930, but in this new century SF and fantasy has expanded into dozens of sub-categories, and many of them seem to be prospering, so I don’t think Gernsback was too far off the mark in his original appraisals.

*Air Wonder Stories* is gone, but those fans who were fortunate enuf to be there when the science fiction wave rose and crested in 1929 and 1930 have fond memories of the magazine, and so do I. By modern standards this particular issue of *Air Wonder* was not a good one. But for all its clumsiness and awkward crunching of stories into a future aviation format, it offered some good stories and it served as a proving ground for the writers and for the fans who were to follow. And even today, more than eighty years after those issues first appeared, many of them are still enjoyable reading. What more could you ask from any science fiction magazine?
READER REACTION

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Thanks for adding me to your mailing list on Fadeaway. My hobby interests don’t overlap with your readership’s to a great extent, but I’ve been enjoying learning more about related areas and reading your recent discussions on e-books.

I’m a big believer in technology as tools, so I get something new whenever I find a need, as I would with any tool or appliance. As a result, I don’t have an e-reader or tablet yet (or a juicer). Most of my books are received as presents (which wouldn’t be quite the same received as digital downloads) or from hunting them down at book sales (which can’t be replaced by “hunting” online).

I also am a member of Paperback Swap (www.paperbackswap.com), where thousands of us trade paperbacks for free (ie, for the approximate $2 postage fee to mail each). It’s true: I not only still read actual books, I mail them to others when I’m done! I’m still using services from the 18th century! I suppose that might be expected from a guy who’s often called Mr. Silver Age.

I’m always skeptical of proclamations about The Death of Something, because the new approach often doesn’t capture all that is unique about the original and because people are creatures of habit. I’m especially reminded of how e-mail and word-processing were going to create The Paperless Office. But today, studies show more paper is being used not less (to print out all those e-mails).

E-readers offer different sensory experiences than books. That’s unlike MP3 players, which I listen to with headphones just as I did my transistor radio, Walkman and Discman. The difference might not be of enough importance to many readers to matter, certainly as younger generations grow up with e-readers (especially if they start using them for textbooks, where they could offer a great benefit if students can adjust to using that format as a studying tool).

I also don’t see the savings that are said to accrue from e-books. Upfront, of course, there’s the cost of the hardware that has to be amortized over every subsequent book purchase. Plus, as a quick example, if I want to read a mystery series such as John Sandford’s “Prey” series (which I do read), I can buy the paperback of book #1 in the series at Amazon for $8.78 or the Kindle version for $9.99. Or I can walk into almost any used bookstore or library book sale and find the series for $1 or $2 apiece most times—which will give me a tangible book I can give, lend or sell to someone else. eBay offers similar pricing, especially if I’m buying a group of books.
So I remain skeptical that e-books will be taking over any time soon, except for buyers of hardcover bestsellers—and that’s a small group at best. The cost of physically producing a book is such a small part of the total cost that the savings will be minimal.

That said, my own book, “Baby Boomer Comics,” a hilarious look at those great comics from the Silver Age, which has been out of print for many years, is now available as a Kindle edition from Amazon. So as an author, I’m all in favor of e-books! I sure don’t make any money off the ones regularly sold on eBay.

The biggest problem I see is that media folk tend to be on the leading edge (if only so they can write about their new toys). That makes other media and consumer-goods marketers decide that everyone has these toys. Soon the only way to get instructions for your new tool or learn about product offers comes from going to a web site or snapping a photo of a tag on a Smart Phone.

Those are still part of an upscale lifestyle that doesn’t represent many Americans. “Cyber Monday,” as it’s called, results from the fact that most people don’t have a Web connection at home and have to wait until they get into work on Monday to shop online. That points out how the wireless, Smartphone world that so many take as a given is more closely related only to an upscale market. Targeting information only in those forms misses a large part of the market.

Once that becomes the default, a lot of people will be left out. My Newsweek this week has online interviews with Oscar contenders available only for those with their Ipad app. This doesn’t endear me to Newsweek.

It will be interesting to see the impact of e-readers on comic book sales, where it is just starting to make inroads. Those sales are much more collector-oriented, although there are a growing number of people who realize that today’s comics generally offer very little collector value beyond their own collection. At some point, if the market becomes too split, the periodicals (I hate the term “pamphlet”) may not have enough support to continue being produced, which will drive the market into e-books—and retail shops out of business.

Speaking of which, I have to say that I find all of the gnashing of teeth about the closing of Borders that I’ve seen online to be ironic. B&N and Borders used to be the enemy, coming into town and driving out all those great Mom & Pop bookstores that were cozy and well-informed, etc. Then people found that Borders offered a much wider selection with fairly well-informed people (at least some times). Now book buyers reminisce about how they could spend an entire afternoon soaking up all the good vibes at Borders.

That’s a drastic turnaround! I wonder when it will happen that people bemoan the fact that Amazon no longer ships books but only offers downloads, and how they miss finding that Amazon box in the mail. Ah, the good old days.

I agree with some of your correspondents who say that it’s hard to predict how technology will change the culture, because it’s happening so fast in so many ways at increments that are hard to track—and because your audience skews so heavily to an older generation that may not adapt to new technologies quickly due to habit or aren’t that impressed with “new.” We are not the people lining up to buy the new iPhone overnight—but the outliers (who often write the online blogs and news columns) know no other life.

By the way, I have to admit I had a hard time determining if your opening “Percocet” editorial was satiric. There are plenty of people who feel just that way about television. It can be difficult to write satire these days, as social media allow us to learn the wacky stuff that people are willing to believe strictly because it fits their world view.

Altho even you seem to have found something of value in one of Bruce Springsteen’s 57 channels of nothing being on. I think all media—and possibly (gasp) old-time radio—adhere to Sturgeon’s crap-ratio law. And, of course, we won’t all agree on which is the good 10%. But anyone who writes off all of TV is missing a good deal of entertaining and educational material. We just have to chase it down, which is true of quality in any medium.

I’m always fascinated by hobbyists who look down their nose at other hobbyists—SF readers or OTR fans looking down on comic-book readers or fans of Golden Age TV, any of them looking down on sports fans (which seems common). I can understand not participating in the interest and even not understanding why it would be of so much interest, but dismissing people as inferior because of that interest shows little self-awareness. We’re all geeks.

Thanks again for giving me some perspective on the appreciation of long-gone programming and genres!
I don’t have any kind of e-book reader, but I know plenty of people who do. The primary advantages, as mentioned in the letter column missives pro and con, is that e-books are much cheaper than print copies, and that they are infinitely easier to store. Yes, there is a large initial upfront cost, but then, there is usually an initial up-front cost to any kind of new technology, particularly technology involving entertainment. TV sets, stereo systems, video or DVD machines all cost something up front, but you get the advantages of the machine that translates vinyl, tape, disks or radio waves to entertainment. As mentioned in the letters and my response to those letters, I believe the cost of the basic e-reader is going to come down, and there are already off-brands that sell for under a hundred bucks.

Most people are not really concerned much about the up-front cost of the readers, they are concerned about the enormous savings in storage space and the lower cost of the product. As a guy who lives in a house stacked to the rafters, literally, with comics, magazines, books and the like, I can understand that this has enormous appeal. A friend cheerfully explains to me that he can store almost ten thousand books on his Kindle, and read anything he wants, any time, with any type font, any type size he likes, or even have the machine read the material back to him. This is all a huge plus.

The fact of the matter is that most people only read their books or magazines once or twice over the course of a lifetime. For these folks especially, an e-reader is exactly what they need. The cost of the books is inexpensive, and it takes up no storage space at all.

That cost advantage is also important. You are comparing the cost of a new paperback to the cost of a new just-released hardback in e-version. The two don’t compute. The upfront cost of a new hardback book is $27.50, or more, vs. a $9.99 download for the electronic version. Many paperback books that sell for about eight bucks new, are available in e-versions for $3.99. In addition, you don’t have to scour physical book stores and newsstands hoping one of them will actually carry the paperback book you want. The selection of books for e-readers is always available and in stock online, and remains available forever. It is my opinion that prices for electronic books will go much lower, and very soon.

In addition, to also recap what many other letter writers mentioned, vast amounts of older material, and tons of public domain books can be downloaded for $1.99 or less. I again cite the example of almost everything H.P. Lovecraft or Robert E. Howard ever wrote for just $1.99 for the e-book version, or almost everything Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ever wrote over the course of his entire lifetime available for ninety-nine cents, total. Print books can hardly compete against this, and I don’t think traditional publishers are going to try much longer.

The entire playing field is shifting dramatically, and only the fact that neo-luddites like you and me, and a lot of genre readers, including those of us who read and collect comics and science fiction is holding up the wholesale rush to total electronic conversion. As we who prefer to not only read print, but to actually collect it and save it dwindle down, even the hardcore collector producers, including small press and those who produce compilations of rare comic strips and golden age comics are going to cave in to the electronics tidal wave.

In fact, so far as I am concerned, this battle has already been won by the e-reader. Here is a link to a long article/interview with prominent author Barry Eisler who just turned down a half million dollar advance royalty contact with St. Martin’s Press to self publish his novel in electronic form, because he is convinced he will make far more money with an e-book than with the printed version. I think the subject is done.


Geeze, I ought be shocked that you had a hard time telling if my editorial condemnation of TV programs was humor or not, but I suppose I shouldn’t be. The focus of modern living has shifted enormously these days, with people confronted by an incredible barrage of bizarre facts that seem almost beyond belief, except they happen to be true. All this overload of the incredible-but-true has numbed the senses of lots of people. But, rest assured, it was humor, and I hope you had a chuckle or two out of it.

I’m certainly not snobbish of anybody’s hobbies or preferred forms of amusement. It may be hard to accept that teeny tiny pieces of paper used to carry the mail back and forth could be collected and worth serious buckos, for instance, but I have long since come to the conclusion that anything ever made by humans hands is automatically collectable.

That’s one thing the press of modern civilization with new technology and informational overload has produced, a lot more tolerance for other people’s interests. I’m sure you remember the days of the late fifties and early sixties when mentioning that you happened to read and collect comic books was equivalent to have a big W branded on your forehead (for Weirdo!) Things have changed for the better, at least in this respect.///
Hi Robert. Or, “Dear Surviving Robert”. For we must now look forward to a world without Robert Sebella, the one who cared about such outré things as who was the Senior SF writer. (Since Jack Williamson’s death, it’s been Fred Pohl.) It’s getting to be like the Jewish Daily Forward, where for a while the editors used to reduce the print run after checking the obituary column.

To Frank Mazzarella: the point is the comment about comics being used as a launch pad for creating a franchise. This was where Lucas came in; while “Star Wars” was a hit, the distribution tended to make income from the movie disappear. Selling tie-ins made for a new revenue source. Where one item succeeds, other follow that business model.

A greater part of this, I suppose, was the transition in control of comics (also book publishers, movie companies, etc.). Originally, these were produced by people who were creative (ably or not) businessmen (able or not). Now they have become divisions of corporations that are run by business executives and see all items from the perspective of profit centers. Which is why they view experimentation as bad, franchisees as good, and so you are going to see “Robin Hood II: This Time It’s Personal!” at the Cineplex. The focus group (of old RRH watchers) liked it.

Frederick Mow: regarding losses in the shift to new formats; I’ve always like to cite “Pixie Dixon and the Mystery of the Haunted Playpen”. If the few surviving texts are such items, they are going to become valued no matter what. And, as you point out, there are format issues. Having read about nitrate-stock films blowing up, I understand the problem of the avid collector whose Betamax player has irreparably broken.

Me: “the infamous deletion of the George Orwell novel ‘1984’”. Amazon is at war with Eastasia. Amazon has always been at war with Eastasia. About the only more ironic incident was a picture I saw of a surveillance camera on George Orwell Street in Barcelona.

Editing “Fahrenheit 451” to comply with school board requirements---that’s doing to Ray Bradbury what Rachel Bloom wanted him to do to her, but not nearly as fun.

Mary Cantor: there has been such a shift in gaming. I thought the progression was ironic: SPI, the big board wargame publisher, was bought by TSR, the big role-playing game publisher, which was bought by WotC, the big card game publisher, which was bought by Hasbro, a more conventional game publisher (which also owns Avalon Hill, the other big board wargame publisher). This parallels the shift of gaming. But now everything’s MMORPG’s, which is why Neal Stephenson’s “Reamde” is hot now and in five years will be up there with “Ralph 124C41+”.

Brad W. Foster: if you already know what you want, on-line stores have a great advantage. I could not get “South With Scott” at a local book store. If you want to find something new, you can’t get that rush of discovery on line. I found “The Log of ‘Bob’ Bartlett” at a used book store ion downtown Chambersburg.

Lloyd Penney: reboots happen every few years in comics continuity. When I was reading Superman, Jonathan Kent (Clark’s stepfather) was a late World War I veteran. Last I saw, he was a still-living Korean War vet, and that may have changed again. And sometimes a clean-up is necessary. I recall the “Crisis” where DC cleaned up the continuity by disposing of a number of alternative worlds, the number of which had gotten out of hand.

Milt Stevens: there gets to be a problem with the original inventor blocking later developments. There were patent problems with automobiles, the Wright Brothers made absolute pests of themselves against other fliers and so on. So Edison’s attempted Conquest of the Cinema is not out of keeping.
As for humorous riffs on comic standards, you might want to look up Atomic Laundromat (http://www.atomiclaundromat.com).

Joy V. Smith; 404 E. Beacon Rd.; Lakeland, FL 33805

Thank you for sending me *Fadeaway* #27, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I loved your illustrated visit to John Cody; that was fun! Good review of “Noctet”, a book I happen to have on my own shelves, though I enjoyed the origin story more than you did. I thought it fit into the strangeness of that little system very well. (I bought “Noctet” some years ago, tho I don't remember where I got it.)

Lots of interesting LOCs. I always enjoy the background the readers share. I haven't bought an e-reader yet, nor do I plan to. I prefer print, but I've read enough books on the computer to see the advantages of an e-reader. And I've published some e-books myself (SF reprints and a non-fiction e-book about the foreclosure I bought and put back together). I enjoyed all the illos also.

///Well, I thot the origin story for Madonna-Moloch was certainly weird, but it was internally inconsistent. Manachino established a few premises at the beginning of the story, then as the story developed, he either ignored them or created something entirely different. As an example, he sets the adventure on an inter-galactic space ship the size of a small moon, but then a third of the way thru, we learn that the people on this ship elects the captain by ballot (this is the guy in charge of the technical and administrative survival of the ship and everybody on board!), that it is a tightly structured society, except, by the way, they have slums (in a spaceship!), and criminal gangs! It just didn’t hold together. Considering the overall excellence of the other stories in the volume that one stuck out like a sore thumb.

Steve Stiles will appreciate your comments about the “Visit to John Cody” art.

I don’t have any immediate plans to buy an e-reader myself, but it is clearly the wave of the future. It may well be a race to see how many publishers can abandon print and jump to the electronic format. There are already off-brand readers that are selling for under a hundred bucks each, and the stream of public domain material being offered in electronic format has reached flood proportions. I think the next six to eight months will see a major shift in the way the printed word is experienced by the public at large.///

R-Laurraine Tutihasi; 2081 W. Overlook St.; P.O. Box 4323; Oracle, AZ 85623-5323

I know I'm still behind, as another issue arrived in the mail a couple of days ago.

But I still wanted to let you know I enjoyed this issue, in particular the pair of articles discussing the future of publishing--paper books or e-books? Just as with LPs, I have a feeling that both will go on for at least a generation or so. I like the feel of holding a book, and (horrors!) I actually write notes in the margins from time to time or make corrections to printing errors. On the other hand, e-books are remarkably handy when I'm not at home. Whether I'm reading something in a doctor's waiting room or on vacation, not having to carry a real book around is a blessing. Also when I have trouble sleeping at night, I can read on my iPhone without turning on any lights and disturbing my husband.

With reference to the LoC from John Thiel, we've become more familiar with strange refrigerator noises recently than we ever wanted. Our big kitchen refrigerator started making occasional noises as though we had a woodpecker inside. GE tell us that's normal. My small pet refrigerator started making swooshing sounds. I looked in the manual, and it says that's normal. Both units still seem to be doing the job of keeping things cool, so I'm not going to worry about it.
In *Fadeaway* #27, you had me accepting that you hated television as much as most people hate broccoli. It seemed you might hate television as much as Marty Cantor hates television. Marty really, really hates television. He only makes an exception for Angels baseball which he does watch. Just before your comments on television, you mention the letter column in the current issue is the largest you have ever had. Expressing strong and controversial opinions is not a usual strategy for shrinking a letter column. That’s usually has the opposite effect.

There is a whole lot of STUFF on television. With the normal operation of Sturgeon’s Law, you can find a lot to dislike. I think my current service offers 139 channels. There are channels on all sorts of subjects in all sorts of languages. Since I don’t want to deal with that many channels, I only have about 20 normally available on my TV. Most of them are movie channels. I watch a lot of movies from the silent era up to the present. I also have the network stations on the off chance they might come up with something interesting. They don’t 99% of the time.

Back when network television was all there was, I didn’t watch much television. I didn’t have much time to watch television when I was in college, and television wasn’t available when I was in the Navy. By the time I got out of the Navy, I was out of the habit of watching television. I didn’t even own a television for the next ten years.

Strangely enough, you mention Snow White and the identities of other dwarves. As it happens, the only network show I’m currently watching is *One Upon A Time*. In last week’s episode, Show White has been thrown in jail by Prince Charming’s father. The king wants his son to marry the daughter of King Midas. It’s a matter of fiscal attraction. While in jail, Snow White meets Grumpy who has had some problems with a hot diamond. Another dwarf named Stealthy springs the both of them, and they take it on the lamb. Little Bo Peep will probably show up next week.

When you started talking about rhubarb I knew you were funning us. Rhubarb is obscure. I’m sure I’ve never eaten any of it and may never have seen any of it. The association between radio fans and rhubarb seems entirely unlikely. The real clincher was when you mentioned watching CSPAN. I’ve heard that CSPAN really stands for Can’t Sleep—Politics All Night. CSPAN only exists so the CIA can use it to torture political prisoners. I shudder to think of anyone voluntarily watching it.

I never meant to imply that having a humongous long letter column was an aggravation or inconvenience. I want letters of comments on the fanzine, lots of them. I was just sort of amazed that the topic of e-books covered in issue #26 would evoke such an avalanche of reader response.

So far as television goes, I haven’t watched much TV in the past thirty years. I got out of the habit when I opened my science fiction/comics/game store and was working long hours every week. My spare time was spent gaming or reading or listing to OTRadio. I found I got out of the habit of watching television completely, didn’t miss it at all, and never got back into the habit. On occasions when I stay at hotels or am in other places where television is available, I find I mostly watch the history channel anyway, so I’m sure I’m not missing much.

On the other hand, I seem to be the rare exception here. Almost everybody I know seems to plan their lives around what programs are offered on the tube, to the point where it is clear that for a lot of people this is a core segment of their lives.

Sturgeon’s Law only applies, it seems to me, if you count in a lot of other material that doesn’t directly interest you. I’m sure most sports fans, for example, would disagree that 90% of sports of crud. On the other hand, if the only part of the sports work you are interested in happens to be, say, doubles tennis, the sports fan might regard all the other stuff not related to doubles tennis as a waste of everybody’s time.

I’m not even sure Sturgeon’s Law really applies to science fiction either. Yes, there is a lot of bad stuff out there, but if you are a dedicated science fiction reader and collector, you probably would regard the statement...
that 90% of it was crud as being a gross exaggeration. If you were a jaded old SF reader you might tend to be more agreeable to the concept. Sturgeon’s Law is a clever statement about the mixture of good and bad stuff, but I don’t think it has literal application anywhere.///

Jerry Kaufman; PO Box 2507; Seattle, WA 98165

So did A.T. Box do a lot of art for the pulps? Looks something like a Frank Paul work to me. Just so you know, our Seattle monorail looks very little like a rocket.

Steve Stiles did a fine job of illustrating your visit to John Cody. I hope you will visit Steve sometime, so Cody can return the favor.

At first I was ready to take umbrage at your comparison of Old Time Radio fans to television fans - we do NOT have a television in our bedroom. Once I finished that particular paragraph, I realized you were being satirical. Ho ho. I am amused. But seriously, I'm sure that when radio was in its heyday, there were people calling it junk and declaring their undying allegiance to vaudeville and music hall - except, of course, for those wonderful BBC broadcasts of Sir Thomas Beecham and his orchestra of renown.

Your review of “Noctet” makes it sound intriguing, but to be honest - a refreshing change, I'm sure - I will probably never read it.

All the talk here, and elsewhere, about the disappearance of books and bookstores has me thinking. Another fanzine editor has asked me to write something about books, bookstores, book readers, and so forth, with a focus on my Seattle experiences. Despite the closure of a number of small stores and one big chain, with another seemingly on the ropes, we still have a respectable selection of places to browse.

I've also been thinking about how bookstores could combine the fun of browsing with lower overheads and the ability to provide both physical and digital copies. I've got an idea or two, but it's still too early to talk about. Especially if I can develop the ideas enough to patent them.

If Brad Foster has actually worked up 64 "Foster's forgotten comics," (Lumberman and Splinter are designated #64), that's a book's worth of characters I wanna have. Why am I sitting here when I could be zooming off to Brad's website? (Since I'd be zooming digitally, I'll still be sitting here.)

Joseph Major asks what bunch Lupoff and Shaw thought they were members of; intrigued, I consulted Rich Lynch's outline history of 1960s fandom. I was expecting to find they were members of Fanoclasts. In fact, according to the outline, the Futurians lasted right up to 1960. During that year, there was some conflict (it's in the outline in more detail), and the Lupoffs (Dick and Pat), Larry and Noreen Shaw, and Ted and Sylvia White formed Fanoclasts that year. The Lupoffs were the hosts of the Futurian meeting at which they decided to start the new group.

When I lived in New York, the Lunarian meetings as a whole were rather boring gatherings, altho I liked many individual members. They always started with long business meetings, so we non-members had to wait in another room until the social part began.

I've exhausted my selection of talking points. A bit of proofing and tinkering, and I'll hit Send Now.

file:///E|/temp/123.html

Earlier monorails were designed to look something like rockets. These days the entire concept of monorails seems to have fallen completely out of favor. I was surprised at your mention that Seattle still has a working monorail. How many people make use of it?

Actually I would like to take the opportunity to visit Steve Stiles sometimes, but since he lives a loonng way away from me this is not likely to take place any time soon. Still, who knows. John Cody might be up for some cartoons about other fan cartoonists anyway.
Actually during its heyday radio did not suffer the level of slings and assaults television has over its existence. The concept of radio, entertainment brought directly into a person’s home was such a novel idea that it was regarded with some real respect. The expansion of radio in the 1930s also coincided with the expansion of electrification into most areas of the USA, so both of these miraculous inventions hit at about the same time for most people.

The other thing folks in those days were in awe of was the rapid development of television. It was assumed by almost everyone that in-home television sets would become a reality by the late 1930s or early 1940s. Unfortunately a world war sort of got in the way of things, and by the time TV really did get developed the enormous cost of creating and transmitting programs insured that deep pocket advertisers would have control of the medium.

On radio, for example, you could burn London right down to the ground on a prime-time historical drama for a few hundred dollars. Television could not even begin to approach that kind of grand spectacle. Even a dim echo of those effects would bankrupt all but the most ambitious sponsor.

There was bad stuff on radio, but the percentage of poor material was well below the level of poor material on television thru the years, plus, on radio if something wasn’t working, the networks or the sponsors could pull the plug on the show without creating wholesale financial chaos.

I again recommend “Noctet” to you. It is an excellent collection of truly strange and fascinating fantasy adventures.

I always thought the Lupoffs, Larry Shaw, Ted White etc etc were members of the Futurians in the very early 1960s, but several other people besides Joe Major have told me I’m wrong. Maybe I am. I was active in SF fandom in the early 1960s, but I was in Nashville, TN, which is quite a long ways away from NYCity.

What with the expanding letter column and all, it looks like future issues of *Fadeaway* will have more pages. I suppose increasing the page count goes right along with the increase in postage rates. Maybe I should take up drinking rotgut whiskey and chasing painted floozies. It would probably be less expensive and stressful than being active in this weird hobby.///

**John Thiel; 30 North 18th St.; Lafayette, IN 47904**

Albert Manachino will doubtless be pleased by your review of “Noctet”, and I’m glad to see it. Your notes about him were interesting, particularly the process by which you came to see his book. I hadn’t known he was that active about promoting the volume. It is surely a work of worth, and I appreciate reading your thoughtful analysis of its contents.

I liked the Jetrail Empress cover; very futuristic and with a sense of wonder. The background reminds me of Chinese art, similar to art I’ve seen in Arthur Waley’s book “Translations from the Chinese”.

The back cover art seems to reflect some possibility that it is intended to find out whether readers take a long look at the art.

I enjoyed your editorial comments about television and agree with most of it. Rarely do I see people presenting objections to television, and this includes fandom, tho they’re usually worried about the S iFi channel, which, however, currently has nothing much on it.

Very good character art from Steve Stiles with the “Visit to John Cody” piece. It certainly justifies his reputation.

///I’m sure Steve Stiles will appreciate your kind comments about his art. He has a real knack with faces and expressions to maximize the comedic impact.

Television has become almost an essential part of life for a considerably part of the population these days. I could draw some parallels between American television and the bread-and-circus games of ancient Rome, but why bother? It’s too easy and too obvious, and television addicts won’t notice or care anyway. I suppose there are worse ways for keeping the species amused. If I try hard enuf I might be able to think of a few.

I was amazed that you send your letter by snail mail instead of by email. And you wrote it by hand instead of typing it. And it’s printed, not done in cursive writing. Are you abandoning all the modern conveniences of civilization or something? I’m sure the Post Office and envelope makers appreciate your sending forty-five cents and a penny for the envelope their way. The PO needs every bit of income it can scrape
up, but I personally still prefer email.///

John Purcell; 3744
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Good evening, Robert. It has been a bit since I've taken the time to write a proper LOC to you, and I thank you for continuing to send your fine fanzine to me. So, that out of the way, onward to some comments about this issue.

It is really great to see that you have such an excellent letter section this time. That is something that my fanzine doesn't have much of, but that can be attributed to the fact Askance is primarily an online fanzine. I do print some copies, but not as many as I should to mail out. That is a habit I really need to get into, and once my wife begins her new full-time job in a week and a half, the larger paychecks (she's been working only part time for the last year and a half) will free up printing and mailing money. That is my plan, at least. The extra bucks will also help fund our getting to a couple more conventions each year, so that's definitely a great step forward. But, back to the matter at hand, I have always believed that a fanzine's lifeblood is locs; the more, the better. Obviously you are doing something right with the fanzine. Keep it up.

As for your comments about television, I agree with you that the vast majority of programming is worthless drivel, but your sweeping generalization that it's all mindless pap - courtesy of paraphrasing Karl Marx's famous dictum - does a disservice to some wonderful programming. For instance, I watch a fair amount of PBS, History Channel, Discovery Channel, and assorted news networks on our Cable TV service, even a handful of network shows that I enjoy a great deal; if you haven't seen the CBS comedy "Big Bang Theory" you are missing out on a well-written and extremely funny show. Watch it and you might even recognize some fans (in a figurative sense, that is) in this show's characters. Plus, there are some good science fiction and fantasy related shows: I recommend SyFy Channel's "Eureka", "Warehouse 24", "Merlin", "Being Human", and "Lost Girl," but don't forget about "Sanctuary" and the newer version of "Battlestar Galactica" and its prequel series, "Caprica." Over on Fox (not the news channel, thank Ghu!) there is "Fringe"; ABC's "The River" is pretty good, as is TNT's "Falling Skies." In short, a person has to be selective about what they view on television. For the most part, yes, it's junk, but if you know what to look for, there are a lot of excellent shows out there.

And besides: I also love rhubarb, am a bibliophile, love old radio shows, music of many genres and styles, and married an artist. Be careful with your categorizations. What I would like to know is where you gathered your information about the characteristics of OTR fans. Did you take a survey? One must support their statements with factual documentation, y'know. Then again, you may simply be making all this up (or sort of making it up) just to get a rise out of your readers. Are you? It would not surprise me if that was the case.

I totally loved Steve Stiles' cartoon of "I Call on John Cody." That really had me chuckling. Very funny, and fit in nicely with your zine. Steve has a fantastic artistic style. Kudos to you for getting this for Fadeaway. I am jealous.

I am not too sure about "Noctet" tho you do make it sound interesting. This just proves that sometimes a gem hides buried in dreck, such as Pablo Lennis. Is John Thiel still publishing that fanzine? I know he produces Surprising Stories, an online fiction sf zine, so I wonder if he finally retired Pablo Lennis after god knows how many years. I have seen Argo Books in the dealer's rooms at a number of Texas conventions in these past few years, so I may have to keep my eyes open for this one at the upcoming Aggiecon (March 23-25, 2012) here in town. If Argo Books has a table there, this might be a purchase. We shall see.

Frank Mazzarella wrote a couple of really awesome letters, and I just want to pass along that I liked them. As you know - since I've mentioned this before to you - I no longer read comic books, but do appreciate
them, so much of Frank's letters flew over my head. I have also watched "The Walking Dead" on TMC and it's alright. Kind of repetitive, but that's gonna happen with a zombie television series. Still, it's fun to watch. The make-up is really good, I must admit.

Great illo by Brad Foster on page 15! The concept of superheroes named Lumberjack and Splinter cracks me up. Funny stuff, Brad!

One last thing: Dan Carroll's back cover is reminiscent of the work of the late great Frank Frazetta. Very nice work. Thank you so much for running his work in your zine, Robert, and also everybody else's. I really like the artwork you use each issue. It is definitely a highlight of your fanzine. With that, I am done. Many thanks for sending it, and I look forward to the next issue.

///I think most people tend to be more amendable to writing letters of comment when they have a physical fanzine present. The problem with zines on the internet it that a lot of them tend to resemble blog spaces, of which there are about two and a half billion out there at any one time. A hard copy in hand may solidify that determination to render an opinion or an objection on the articles or material at hand. Having material that evokes reasonable opinion (as opposed to schreeching and mud slinging) is probably also useful.

I am unclear on what Argo Books is doing these days or how active they might be. I sent them a copy of issue #27 with the review of "Noctet", but I have not heard back yet. I believe the owner(s) used to set up at SF and comic conventions, but I just don’t know whether they are still doing that these days. Their web presence seems to be out of date (like that’s unusual—-it seems almost every web business I check these days has an out of date website), but they are still selling and shipping products by mail at least. I again recommend you read “Noctet”. It is a truly strange and unique fantasy world with interesting adventures set within the world. Maranachino has a polished writing style and a distinctive imagination that deserves wider recognition.

Sir, I am shocked, shocked I say, at your suggestion that my commentary on the abysmal quality of modern television or the comparisons between OTRadio fans and TV addicts might have been in any way exaggerated. You impugn my journalistic integrity with your wild assertions.

I’m sure all the artists present last issue will appreciate your kind comments about their work. I’ve always figured good artwork is an essential part of any well constructed fmz, and the folks who have been kind enuf to contribute to Fadeaway are all top notch creators.///

Brad W Foster; PO Box 165246, Irving TX 75016

New issue in the po box this week, always great to find a big envelope there among all the bills and junk!

Attached here should be a new Zero Heroes for you. This is the last one I've got on hand, but has been fun doing these, so if you'd like to see more let me know, and I'll see if I can come up with some new ideas.

You certainly don't hold back on the tv bad/radio good thing! Personally, I don't see either one of those good or bad, just that you have to search around to find the good, and skip over the bad. And I liked how you mentioned the Weather Channel as one of only two exceptions to bad tv. But I'll argue with you on that one, as the Weather Channel -used- to be a channel you could flip to at any time and actually find out what was going on in the weather. Now it's slipped in between shows about hurricanes and storm trackers. I don't think there is any single channel out there anymore that is worth tuning in all the time, just have to find the individual programs worth watching.

Seems so many of the cable channels start with a very specific theme, to sell themselves as something different and special, then rapidly put the same stuff on. A&E was called 'Arts and Entertainment" when it started, and had programming for art, music, plays, etc. Now it is pretty much like any other channel of reruns and boring "reality". Next came "Bravo" to take it's place, with opera and art and music and plays and.... now it's reruns of syndicated shows and boring "reality". Latest channel is "Ovation", which so far is holding it there with programming actually devoted to art and music and such. But, it's only been around a little while, so I'm sure some day soon the corporate folks will go "We need to make more money, can't we run CSI/SUV reruns and maybe one of those cheap-to-produce shows about Cajun Pawn Hoarding Wives?"

Of course, the -nice- thing about there not being a lot of stuff on those 300 channels I would want to watch is that I have the time to do other things!
Interesting review on the "Tales of Madonna-Moloch" book, tho mainly, for me, because you mentioned Larry Dickison. Larry was one of those pen and ink artists who made me look like I wasn't even trying as far as the number of tiny dots he could cram into a drawing. I still trade a Christmas card with him every year, but I don't think he's done much drawing in a long time, which is a shame.

Regarding the comments from Milt Stevens that my Unfortunate Four 'toon reminded him of the Inferior Five- yes, working off the old superhero parody genre, a long and noble branch of comics. Some-where around here I've got a hardbound collection of all 13 issues of Marvel's "Not Brand Echh" comic. Kind of a Mad-style book, but focused more on the superhero satire/parody. I do loves me a good goofy superhero, to balance out all of the overly-serious heroes running/flying around these days.

///Several people took my satirical comparisons between OTRadio and modern TV seriously. Jeeze, I dunno how I can be any more obvious, but there are die-hard television fans who took it personally. For myself I have so much material waiting to be read/viewed/listened to that I have hardly any time at all for television, but everybody can choose their own form of entertainment. Nobody is likely to be influenced much by my opinions on the matter anyway.

I've barely encountered Larry Hickison's artwork at all. Apparently he is no longer very active in the fan world, or maybe he's just busy with professional art. As I said I thot his treatment of non-human subjects was excellent, but he doesn't do quite so well when he tries to render realistic studies of human beings. He cemented his place as the primary artist for a lot of the Manachinaro fantasy stories.

I liked a lot of the MAD imitation comics. Some Not Branch Eech stories were pretty funny, but a bunch of others seemed like self serving pandering to me. When a company tries to satirize itself and its own characters they tend to gloss over a lot of pertinent points that could be better dealt with humorously by some outside, non-involved individuals. I'm fair amazed that Marvel reprinted the series in a hardback edition, but I suppose I shouldn't be. Marvel seems determined finally to reprint almost everything they've ever put out, which is a godsend (and a bankbook saver) for those of us with interests in comics from the forties and fifties.///

Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.; Etobicoke, ON; CANADA M9C 2B2

Thanks for the paper copy of Fadeaway 27. I love the monorail illo on the front. If only more of them have been built. They look so retro now.

While not a collector of Old Time Radio CDs (one can collect only so much without the wallet screaming), I remember listening to the CBS Radio Mystery Theater with E.G. Marshall late at night on CBS, and the CBC used to have a weird story style radio show called "Vanishing Point". I miss what radio used to be. What's my favorite television show these days? The news, newsmagazine shows, documentaries. You know, the original reality television. Television has no entertainment value for me these days. There's been a few shows I have truly enjoyed, but they are very few, and missed now.

I hate the idea of books being pulped and whole libraries of novels being digitized. The e-book thing seems a logical progression, but I hear people say that books are a horrible waste of paper resources, and I can't disagree emuf. Let me enjoy my paper library for the moment. Not only can technologies fail, but they are regularly superseded so that you have to buy the product again. I am sure that future e-readers will not be able to read older e-book files. The only way a paper books crashes is if you drop it on the floor.
Perhaps I will buy myself an e-reader when I find some work. But then, I’d want to find a source of free e-books and then think about inexpensive downloads. I don’t want to take money out of the author’s pocket, but I don’t have much in my own pocket, and frankly, I need to read.

I have been thinking about doing my own fanzine. It’s been many years since I assisted on Torus, edited by Keith Soltys, long years ago. I could produce it in Word, or pdf it, maybe make a few paper copies and go from there.

The English language is strange and weird, and I have the t-shirt about it following other languages down dark alleys and robbing them for loose grammar. The world ‘cleave’ can mean divide or stick together. It is its own antonym.

I’m not sure that monorails were such a great idea. They sparked the public’s imagination back in previous decades, but the reality is that for monorails to function effectively the cities where they would be built would have to be static. However cities are not static. Neighborhoods change, business centers shift, new kinds of businesses spring up in completely different parts of the city, populations shift, and while the cities would change constantly, as they always have, the monorail would not. It would continue to run on existing rails to existing parts of the city whether there was traffic to justify that or not.

The reality is that a decent bus system works much better. Bus routes can change with the city; runs can be increased for heavy newer traffic areas, and decreased or discontinued for areas that no longer need full bus service. Buses are completely flexible and portable transportation, always able to meet the needs of consumers, but monorails are not and never could be.

I like printed books myself, but it seems clear to me that e-books are the future of reading. The two things the reading public has always valued most, lower prices and convenience, are most ably being offered by e-books. There are already plenty of places to download books for free, and newer titles can be had for much lower prices than printed versions.

I don’t see print ever going away, but I see the size and amount of printed material shrinking dramatically in the very near future. It has already started to happen, and I think the trend can only continue. There may come a point where it is no longer feasible to print large quantities of paper books in advance. We may well be heading to a world where every printed volume is a print-on-demand situation, where outfits like Lulu.com that sells and prints books one at a time to one customer at a time are the norm.

English is a living language, which means it changes all the time, including inventing new words, changing the meanings of old words, and borrowing words and terms from other languages. The idea of language purity always struck me as being ridiculous. I recall in the past that France set up a government committee to protect the French language, banning foreign words or phrases. This government program struggled for years, and failed completely in its stated goal of keeping the French language pure and unadulterated. All languages must change, or die, and the English language is changing all the time.///

OUR ESTEEMED ART STAFF & WHERE THEIR WORK MAY BE FOUND HEREIN:

Dan Carroll---Page 46
John V. Cody---Page 34
Brad Foster---Page 2
Alexis Gilliland---Pages 37, 38, 40, 42, 44
Ralph Rayburn Phillips---Page 1
Joost Swarte---Page 3
Clip Art from the Internet---Page 39, 45