

++++  
++++  
S C I E N C E F I C T I O N N E W S  
++++  
++++

No. 101  
February 1987

ISSN 0156-6342

SIXTY YEARS OF AMAZING STORIES  
(continued)

1929-1930

1929 (contd.)

In general the stories were of their own time, which means seriously dated today. Many of the characteristic ideas were already old although not always much explored.

The Fourth Dimension was still a going concern, a concept that still held interest and was to be exploited for another decade before quietly fading away. The Dimension Segregator by J. Harold Click (a oncer) for a change had a method of entering a two-dimensional world, the logical difficulties of which were not of course addressed. Gold Dust and Star Dust by Cyril G. Wates was an example of antisocial application, a fourth dimensional robbery technique. Microcosmic Buccaneers by Harl Vincent invoked the fourth dimension as a method for reduction in size to the submicroscopic (another idea that was to be quietly dropped when SF reached adolescence).

But the most significant entry here was The Book of Worlds by Miles J. Breuer, which introduced the thought of a series of three-dimensional worlds (read: universes) lying as close together as pages in a book in the fourth dimension. A method of seeing other pages is found and a series of slightly different worlds of increasing age is revealed -- in effect a series of probably future times by analogy. The inventor is so shocked by the increasing horrors he sees as to become deranged -- an ending employed by a few others. But the point is that here emerges the notion of multiple worlds accessible through some special technique, later usually rationalised as alternate probabilities branching from some past turning point in each case, which has become one of the most pernicious elements in science fiction.

Biological themes were represented by a few stock ideas. There was extreme longevity achieved accidentally in The Young Old Man by Earl L. Bell; Organ transplants in The Superperfect Bride by Bob Olsen and The Dog's Sixth Sense by W. Alexander (which also rambled

## Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

Keeping a patient's head alive without saving the body as a whole in *The Eternal Professors* by David H. Keller; synthetic life in *The Colloidal Nemesis* by Vincent; gigantism in *The Beetle Experiment* by Russell Hays.

Verne was still on the scene, represented by some of his less remarkable works and increasingly out of tune with the rest of the magazine. *The English at the North Pole* and its continuation *The Desert of Ice* were however his last appearance for four years and one surmises that reader approval of this tale of polar exploration with scarcely any hint of science fiction was slight.

There was plenty of variety and some original thinking if not very well developed. *The Moon Strollers* by J. Rogers Ulrich inspired an attractive and spectacular Paul cover in May. The strollers were space suits, robust metal ones used on a first Lunar expedition, and the story is full of sensible ideas on space flight. Traces of departed life are found, with some scanty air and water deep below the surface, then a reasonable prediction. Experiments in signaling the group's presence on Luna to Earth, the radio having failed, attract the attention of Martian astronomers who show their presence with large figures on a polar cap.

*The Radio-Telescope* by Stanton A. Coblentz in June described not what we now understand by the term but a sort of photomultiplier. The device gives such resolution as to view extrasolar planets from the viewpoint of an observer on their surfaces. As often happened the invention was accidentally destroyed and its creator was unable to reconstruct it, the author thereby avoiding any consideration of long term results and further applications.

*A Baby on Neptune* by Clare Winger Harris and Miles J. Breuer in December suggested something rarely thought of: the quite non-human people of frigid Neptune lived at a very slow rate with correspondingly slowed awareness of time, so that from the viewpoint

of Terran observers they were not even obviously alive.

A distinctly odd interplanetary tale was *Out of the Void* by Leslie F. Stone in August and September. A lone volunteer taking off for Mars by rocket and ending up somewhere else was not without precedent -- Burroughs for instance had used such a misadventure in *The Moon Maid* -- but this time our hero was a woman raised as a boy by her misogynistic moneybags of a father and passing as a man in the early 20th Century. Such voyages were likely to attract a stowaway, but in this case the stowaway proved to be an old acquaintance who had penetrated her disguise. "I loved you before I knew you were a woman" he reveals, making it worse! Those readers who did not lose patience at this point may not have been bothered by other oddities to follow.

Missing Mars in the traditional manner by lousy navigation the pair eventually reach the outskirts of the Solar system; Neptune is not mentioned and Pluto had not of course been reported at the time, but what should they find but that "beyond Uranus lies Abrui, a small planet that has never been discovered by Earthly astronomers and follows somewhat the path taken by Uranus." Too chilly for plot purposes? Not in your life: it is warmed by a small incandescent satellite. (Why couldn't they see that from Earth?) Abrui supports several human races and various machinations follow. But would not canal-crossed Mars have served as well?

The *Gas-Weed* by Coblenz in May was an aggressive plant brought to Earth by a meteor; the Martians bombarded Earth with radioactive missiles in *Death from the Skies* by Verrill in October, but Earth showed that two can play that game.

Perhaps the worst piece of thinking of the year was in Sam Graves' *Gravity Nullifier* by George Frederick Stratton (another oncer) in August. It was no less than a perpetual motion device: eliminating weight on one side of a wheel starts it turning as the

other side falls...a classic fallacy often cited as a proof of the impossibility of a gravity screen. Another entrant was a cheap simple ornithopter (man-powered incidentally, a good trick) that was going to promote world peace by better communication, in Clouds of Death by Louis Buswell (yes, another oncer) in June. Everyone was going to have one. Great. Worse than cars.

Social and political awareness were not the magazine's strongest aspect, but some stories did show community and international implications of science. Clouds of Death, mentioned before, predicted a time when America, keeping out of World War 2 and amassing vast wealth by screwing the combatants, controlled the world's finance and was universally hated and inevitably besieged.

The Red Peril by Capt. S. P. Meek in September was about, well, the Red Peril. The theme was already overdone but exactly the same sort of stuff is still being written.

The Posterity Fund by Raymond Emery Lawrence (of course, another oncer) in May ended with the world depopulated by advanced armament; but those using it in their own defence were the world's banks, in a time when the financial system was failing and angry mobs were lynching bankers. This concept is curiously timely in May 1929 but goes back to 19th Century fears of such a disaster when jittery capitalists were building fortresses in some American cities just in case.

In The Airlords of Han by Philip Francis Nowlan in March, continuing the story of a modern man translated to the 25th Century, to be adapted to comic strip form as Buck Rogers, there is a well thought out description of the society of the Han people who in that era have conquered America. It is not the usual static picture but shows a complex culture with a long history and still undergoing change, indeed in crisis. "The physically active men of the community were beginning to acquire a rather dangerous domination. These

## Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

included men in the army, in the airships, and in those relatively few civilian activities in which machines could not do the routine work and thinking. Already common soldiers and air crews demanded and received higher remuneration than all except the highest ... industrial and scientific leaders, while mechanics and repairmen who could, and would, work hard physically commanded higher incomes than Princes of the Blood, and though constituting only a fraction of one per cent of the population they actually dominated the city. San-Ian (the head of state) dared take no important step in the development of the industrial and military system without consulting their council or Yun-Yun (Union)...

"The army exercised a cruelly careless and impartial police power over all classes, including the airmen when the latter were in port. But it did not dare to touch the repair men, who, so far as I could ever make out, roamed the corridors of the city at will during their hours off duty, wreaking their wills on whomsoever they met without let or hindrance...

"In the last analysis it was these Yun-Yun men, numerically the smallest of the classes, who ruled the Han civilisation, because for all practical purposes they controlled the machinery on which that civilisation depended for its existence.

"Politically, San-Ian could balance the organisations of the army and the air fleets against each other, but he could not break the grip of the repairmen on the machinery of the cities and the power broadcast plants."

Altogether the magazine presented a wide range of material with plenty of interest.

The feedback from readers in Discussions was improving. J. W. Saunders in a lengthy letter in March made some points worth quoting today.

"And now for the September (1928) issue. In the

first place I notice that the cover is at least human (though of course it isn't, after all)... This was the cover devoted to the Scientifiction symbol. "Many more covers like this and you'll make hundreds of friends that have been hitherto frightened away by the frightful fancies of Paul... Paul is all right as long as he doesn't draw a human being from the rear. When he does that, the faces are frightful. And then, sometimes the faces are, anyway." Did he really mean that? Paul's people were uniformly drawn with square bums or startled expressions according to orientation.

After further thoughts on the art work and a suggestion to collect a book of Gernsback's editorials he considers some stories. "The Ambassador from Mars was good, but why must all scientific stories of lost races and the like end tragically? When there's a purpose, that's different, but apparently there was none here. Compare this ending with that in The Sunken World and you can see the ending with a purpose and the ending without. The destruction of the Sunken World was a bit of satire, poking fun at the slowness and carelessness of the modern nations, which is almost comparable with Swift's bitterest moments."

Others were dissatisfied with the art work, covers in particular. A frequent theme was that they were too much of a good thing. "There is only one thing that I do not care for... The cover of Amazing Stories is too lurid for ordinary quiet people." At greater length: "I had noticed your magazine upon the newsstands for a long time. I also noticed that copies could be obtained of issues long after those of other magazines had been exhausted. This indicated that, here at least, it is not a good seller. I further noticed that the dealers place it on their shelves with other glaring-covered magazines of an undesirable type. Consequently it never occurred to me to purchase a copy. I was eventually led to do so... Of course, once I had secured a copy of the magazine I found the stories interesting, and was really "amazed". But this feeling arose from the fact that



## Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

the contents of the magazine were utterly different than one would suppose from the cover..."

But others differed. Three women writing in the same issue -- all by the way nervously apologising for their presence -- approved the covers. Noting a previous letter from Mrs L.F.Silberberg (Leslie F. Stone, see above) Ruth Chadderton wrote: "Please don't, I like the pictures and I'm sure that others do too." Lovina S. Johnson agreed: "I like the covers very much. They help to give one an idea of what the stories are about...As to the bright hues of the cover, they are in style, are they not? We women wear dresses of all colors, and combine colors that fight yet achieve artistic results." Alice Franklin wrote: "I want to say something in favor of your so-called flashy cover. In August of 1927 I happened to be in Chicago. One afternoon I got off the "L" and it was raining, I was obliged to wait in the lobby until it ceased. There was a newsstand in this lobby and I believe that every publication in the U.S. was represented there...Suddenly a bright cover flashed through all the rest and it proved to be the Amazing Stories for August 1927...I'll always have a warm place in my heart for Chicago due to the fact that it was there that I first got acquainted with Amazing Stories. A lucky day for me!"

Another defender of Paul, Harry Alonzo Barnes, reasoned thus: "Amazing Stories contains the most unusual type of fiction that is published in the United States today. Is it not all in the line of good policy that the illustrations should be as extravagant and apparently preposterous as the stories which they illustrate?"

In May Oral Arnel dwelt on another difficulty, the magazine's title, in a lengthy piece. After some stuff about calling a diamond carbon: "...as I was about to pass a newsstand, a particularly colorful magazine cover caught my eye. I knew less about this



magazine than I did about diamonds, and was again sharply disappointed to see blazoned in shrieking letters across the top, Amazing Stories. The name fairly reeked of trash, sensationalism; and dropping the magazine, I continued on my way without stopping to notice that the remarkably well executed illustration with its wealth of scientific detail had no place on such a class of magazine as the name implied...a flashing brilliancy had caught my eye and aroused curiosity, but the name had placed each article on such a cheap basis that it killed all interest, before I could investigate further. How different it would have been if some more conservative title had appeared! Some name to change idle curiosity to lively interest. A stranger to the name would perhaps wonder just what it meant, but almost before the thought could form he would buy it...Next his attention would turn to the illustration, Paul's remarkable work would do the rest."

"Just because you started with this handicap, must you keep it throughout the many coming years that your marvellous magazine must surely be with us?"

Mrs. H. Snyder wrote "I have been a reader of Amazing Stories since almost the first issue, and I was attracted to it by the cover! I am never ashamed to be seen buying or reading it -- in fact, I display it on every occasion possible. I, for one, have never enjoyed being one of the crowd, but prefer to do my own thinking, and when I see another person reading Amazing Stories I know that there is one who, like myself, has dared to break away from the so-called 'popular' type of fiction and read stories that are full of excitement, daring adventure, and in many instances prophecy."

H.A.Kunitz pointed out the fallacy of the then common Cold of Space, concluding: "The loss by radiation away from Earth should not be more than on its surface. Loss by conduction and convection depend on a surrounding body, which we assume to be absent in interstellar space. Consequently, as our body depends on

## Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

a certain amount of heat-loss to maintain an equilibrium, it would seem that if we should travel away from Earth, we would have to think of means to guard ourselves from too much heat, rather than too much cold."

John G. Roche was dissatisfied with the ending of Wells' *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and offered: "Why couldn't Mr Wells continue his story something like this?

"He was beaten but London was safe. But was he beaten? Even as he thought that he would soon go to his final sleep, and there meet his old comrades, the Aeropile-side-slipped, met the earth with a long grinding noise that drowned out the shouts of the vast number of the people of London -- a soft pleading voice, such a voice as only an angel could possess, caught his ear. Surely this must be heaven, his heaven, the heaven where all were equal. The heaven which should have been his many years before. Graham also heard a terrific shouting about his, probably the cries of the lost souls, now in the hands of Satan.

"Slowly Graham opened his eyes, expecting to face his master, to be judged as the Lord saw fit -- to be saved and meet his old comrades, or to be damned and again go through a hell such as he had just left.

"But lo -- there stood Helen, his Helen, wonderful creature, the crowd roared, but Helen heard not. Her arms were clasped around his neck, her lips, soft and full met his.

"Certainly two hundred years had not stamped its mark on love, for Cupid still roamed and ruled the hearts of the people of the world.

"His people could have his wealth, his title of Master and even the whole world, but Helen was his forever."

The editorial comment on this was restrained: "This ending of Mr Wells' story speaks for itself. We wonder what Mr Wells will think when he reads it." His reaction is not known to be available.

1930

In January there were no less than seven science fiction magazines on sale. Amazing Stories plus its Quarterly special were in competition with Gernsback's Science Wonder Stories, Science Wonder Quarterly, Air Wonder Stories and a new project, Scientific Detective Monthly; and another publisher appeared with Astounding Stories of Super Science. Obviously this level of activity would give more scope and attract many more writers. The crippling depression was to have drastic effects on the movement, but not just yet. The next three years were to be on the whole a time of consolidation.

But the January 1930 Amazing was not a great issue. Two established names were there but with minor efforts. Keller's Air Lines had no plot to speak of but merely contemplated the possible social impact of efficient air traffic replacing ground transport. Breuer's The Hungry Guinea Pig was a routine piece on gigantism. The experimental animal induced to grow to vast proportions always proved a dangerous object, as the experimenters did not seem to anticipate. Here a guinea pig, certainly a better choice than a beetle or spider, grown to bigger than a house naturally did plenty of damage hunting for food.

The Sword and the Atopen by Taylor H. Greenfield must have seemed a faint echo of Nowlan's stories with invading Mongols using antigravity and disintegrating bombs, but the treatment was very dull. The First Ornithopter by Jack Winks had a feeble plot with fuzzy explanation of a personal battery-powered flier. The Corpse that Lived by E.D. Skinner, set in 2026, was full of barely described new devices and practices besides the reviving of a frozen casualty that gave it its title; but projecting the clearly disastrous madness of Prohibition a hundred years ahead and still not working -- with a similar ban on tobacco added and similarly resisted -- well, credulity has limits.

There was a new writer who was to make his presence felt, to say the least. John W. Campbell Jr.

## Sixty Years of Amazing Stories

Campbell's first appearance, *When the Atoms Failed*, was practically all exposition at the expense of action, and reads rather like a burlesque of his later works, but it was an outstanding first by 1930 standards.

Mars attacks with 20 atomic-powered vessels; but coincidentally a lone genius has just invented practically everything: matter-energy total conversion (hence the title), gravity control, space flight naturally, atomic bombs, disintegrator and heat rays. The Martian invaders are a pushover, the the surviving ship is sent to Venus with advice to colonise it instead. Oh, and world peace is imposed on Earth.

The overreliance on theory here is notable. Once the inventor works out the maths on his trusty super-calculator the actual gadget is easily knocked up with no mention of engineering design problems. One thinks of Campbell's later overvaluation of logic and emphasis on insight and lateral thinking.

(to be continued)

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS  
No. 101, February 1987

ISSN 0156-6342

Issued irregularly for members of the  
Australian Science Fiction Association

GPO Box 4440, Sydney 2001  
Annual subscription \$7.00

Graham Stone, Secretary