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ere we are again, filling activity credits for another two-mailing period. The history of Astounding which follows on the next 5 pages has a history all its own-- it was written in September 1950, and sold to SPACE MAGAZINE, the ill-fated semipro. When SM folded, I sent the article to Alan Grant, who stencilled it for WYDE STAR--and when WS folded, he sent me the stencils. Besides running them here, I'll use them in a forthcoming issue of SPACESHIP, my subzine.

In the thirteen months since the article was written, I've nearly completed my file of ASF (I lack only about 15 issues from the first to date) and I've picked up much info on the mag not included in the article. Hence

these addenda:

- 1) All artwork in the first few issues was done by J. Fleming Gould. Wesso did the covers until 1933, when Howard Brown took over. Brown's last cover appeared November 1938.
- 2) Under the Clayton publishers, the magazine appeared as a bi-monthly for these issues: Sept Nov 1932, Jan Mar 1933. No July 1932 issue appeared.
- 3) The wordage as given at the bottom of page 3 should read "85,000"
- 4) The first Campbell issue was January 1938, not March 1938 as erroneously given.
- 5) Hubert Rogers' first cover appeared in February, 1939
- 6) The logotype was changed in December 1938 and slightly revised in October 1939.
- 7) The material on page 6 is, of course, obsolete and dated. Bear in mind that the stencils were cut more than a year ago.
- 8) Changes in the backstrip of the magazine were made with each of these issues: Oct 33, Dec 34, Oct 36, March 38, Dec 38, Oct 39, Jan 42, May 43, Nov 43, and Feb 47.

It's my intention to serialize an article on Astounding in SAPS thru 1952 and early 1953, with the entire affair later to be bound and offered for sale to the general fan public. The following article will serve as an introduction.

The first part of the more detailed ASF biog will appear, probably, in the 19th Saps mailing, and it'll cover the Clayton era issue by issue.

Incidentally, the interlineation on the last page should be disregarded, since the 'editor and publisher' referred to are the original ones, RJ Banks and Alan Grant, who would have issued the article in December 1950.

Bob Silverberg

## A HISTORY OF ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

by Bob Silverberg

## Part 1: The Clayton Era

In the late months of 1929, an undistinguished-looking pulp magazine appeared on the country's newsstands, another in the long chain of Clayton pulps. The title spread across its garish cover, "ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE" indicated its difference from the rest of the science-fiction field from the start.

When that January 1930 issue appeared, there were but 3 other science-fiction magazines in existence: Hugo Gernsback's ponderous SCIENCE WONDER STORIES and semi-sf AIR WONDER STORIES, both huge 9x12 mags, and the slightly smaller AMAZING STORIES. These magazines had trimmed edges and were 96 pages in length.

ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE had 144 pages approximately 7x10, with untrimmed edges. Virtually all artwork was done by an artist named Wesso, who rose to fame along with the magazine.

And who were the authors who helped to found this Clayton pulp? There were seven stories in the first issue. Of those seven authors, only one is still active. Another, famed as the most prolific of fantasy authors has virtually retired. Two others reached their greatest fame during the 1930's and have been forgotten by the newer fandom though fondly remembered by old-timers. Three more have fallen by the wayside of popularity.

The fiction lineup for Vol.1 #1 of ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE:

The Beetle Horde by Victor Rousseau  
The Cave of Horror by Capt. S.P. Meek  
Phantoms of Reality by Ray Cummings  
The Stolen Mind by M.L. Staley  
Compensation by G.V. Tench  
Tanks by Murray Leinster  
Invisible Death by Anthony Pelcher

The first editor of the magazine which was to outshine its competitors for more than a dozen years was Harry Bates; his co-editor was Desmond Hall.

Not long after the magazine started, the "Super Science" disappeared from its title, leaving plain "Astounding Stories"--the title that was to be used until 1938.

Astounding continued in its same format for several years; a few months after its berth, Hugo Gernsback merged his two magazines and changed the format to imitate that of Astounding's; AMAZING remained in large size. The sole artist of Astounding remained W. H. Wesso.

In September 1931 the companion to Astounding, STRANGE TALES, was introduced. ST was a magazine dedicated to the Weird and Grotesque; it struggled along for seven rocky issues and then finally died in January 1933.

ASTOUNDING STORIES, like all, experienced troubles during the depression. After 30 consecutive monthly issues, it was forced to become bi-monthly with the Sept. 1932 issue. It lasted as a bi-monthly for seven rocky issues and stopped publication with the March 1933 issue.

#### Part Two: Street and Smith

Six months later, the old publishing firm of Street and Smith bought the copyright and began issuing "Astounding Stories" again, beginning with October 1933. And since that issue, S&S has not missed a month of ASTOUNDING.

Howard W. Browne replaced Wesso as the cover artist of ASTOUNDING in a short while, and Browne was to continue work right up until World War II. F. Orlin Tremaine was made the new editor, and he went promptly to work, obtaining stories by the leaders in the field.

Edward E. Smith, about the most popular author of Amazing Stories, was persuaded to continue his "Skylark" series in ASTOUNDING after 2 novels of it had seen print in Amazing. With the August 1934 issue, "Skylark of Valeron" started in Astounding.

In the same issue as "Skylark of Valeron", August 1934, are to be found installments of two other classics--"The Legion of Space", by Jack Williamson, and "Lo!" by Charles Fort. Tremaine pioneered in a new type of fiction, most of which is still known as "Classic" despite the 15 years since its publication.

In the meanwhile, a combination of the depression and the steady competition from Astounding forced the two rivals, "Wonder Stories" and "Amazing Stories" lower and lower. In October 1933, Amazing Stories was forced to cut its size from 8½x11 to 7x10 and abandon its trimmed edges; WONDER did the same the following month. Unable to maintain its circulation, Amazing became a bi-monthly in August 1935 and struggled along that way until February 1938, when the bankrupt Teck Company sold out to Ziff-Davis. - Wonder Stories became bi-monthly in October 1935 and folded in April 1936. Later it was resumed as Thrilling Wonder Stories.

ASTOUNDING, meanwhile, made vast steps forward. Such authors as Campbell and Williamson did their greatest work for it. Tremaine's Astounding was the first magazine which had both highly scientific and easily readable stories.

A major improvement occurred in February 1936 when Astounding suddenly appeared with trimmed edges; the format now was 160 pages 9½x6½, trimmed edges, approximately 45,000 words. Covers were by Browne or occasionally Wesso; interiors by Browne, Wesso and Eliot Dold. The original cover logo was still being used: "Astounding" expanding from left to right, with "Stories" in smaller letters underneath it. The backbone colors were usually yellow and black; the price was still at the original 20 cents.

...the first issue of ASTOUNDING was published in October 1933. It was a 32-page magazine with a cover price of 10 cents. The magazine was published by the publisher of the pulp magazine 'Amazing Stories'.

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In the meantime, a combination of the depression and the already completed Great Depression forced the two magazines, "Wonder Stories" and "Thrilling Wonder Stories", to close their doors in October 1933. As a result, the publisher of "Astounding" was forced to get the same publisher, "Amazing Stories" publisher, to publish "Astounding" in August 1933 and arranged along that way until January 1938, when the bankruptcy Tech Company sold out to Bill Davis. "Wonder Stories" became bi-monthly in October 1935 and folded in April 1936. Later it was resumed as "Thrilling Wonder Stories".

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A major improvement occurred in February 1936 when Astounding and "Thrilling Wonder Stories" were merged. The format now was 100 pages daily appeared with trimmed edges, approximately 12,000 words. Covers were by Brown or occasionally Weas; interiors by Brown, Weas and Bill Davis. The original cover logo was still being used: "Astounding" expanding from left to right, with "Stories" in smaller letters underneath it. The background colors were usually yellow and black; the price was still at the original 20 cents.

1936 was the year in which Tremaine took a great gamble by including two stories by a strange Rhode Island recluse. These stories, one a novel, one a three-part serial, were strictly off-trail and far from the science policy of Astounding. Whether they would be kindly received by the science-loving fans of the magazine was doubtful until after publication.

The two stories were acclaimed as among the greatest in weird fiction. Their names: "The Shadow Out of Time" and "At the Mountains of Madness" by one H. P. Lovecraft !

In 1937, tho, a decline came and Astounding fell into a rut. There were, however, several stories of classic stature, but a magazine of the Tremaine Astounding's calibre was definitely in a rut when it produced only one or two classics a year. The most noteworthy story of 1937 was GALACTIC PATROL, by E. E. Smith, the first in the Lensman series. By the end of 1937, it was obvious that something had to be done.

### PART THREE: The Campbell Era, 1938-

It was, therefore, little surprise when F. Orlin Tremaine, the editor who was responsible for Astounding's greatness by securing such stories as "He From Procyon", "Legion of Space", "Shadow Out of Time", "Colossus", "Skylark of Valeron" and "Twilight" was discharged from his duties as editor and replaced by John W. Campbell, Jr.

Campbell had become a science-fiction writer in 1930, after his graduation from Duke University, and has risen to become one of the most popular writers of the fantasy era, along with Smith and a few others. Under the name of Don A. Stuart, he wrote his greatest fiction. He had also done a series of articles for Astounding throughout 1936 and 1937.

March 1938, the first Campbell issue, saw the name changed to "Astounding Science Fiction". The logo remained the same, except for the change in wording. Howard Browne had the job of sole cover artist then. Interior work was done by Dold, Browne, Wesso, Jack Binder, and the veteran Marchioni. Campbell began to develop a new group of authors. Significantly new faces during 1938 include L. Ron Hubbard, L. Sprague de Camp, Willy Ley, Clifford Simak and Ross Rocklynne. The format remained the same, the style began to change subtly. Browne still handled all the covers, but Campbell was promising in 1938's October issue a "new type artist, with a background on which to build the machines of tomorrow". In 1939 Campbell unveiled Hubert Rogers as a science-fiction cover artist. Rogers did practically every Astounding cover from 1939 up to his entrance in the army in 1942; upon his return in 1947 he did almost all of the front cover work up to the end of 1949.

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1939 saw the development not only of Rogers, but of a young Californian named Heinlein and a young Canadian-Californian named Van Vogt. Heinlein wrote almost all of his stories based on one common future history; this group includes six novels published between 1939 and 1942, and one in 1949, all of which are to see print or have already been issued in book form. Van Vogt first hit his stride with a novelet called "Black Destroyer", sequelled it with "Discord in Scarlet", (July, Dec. 1939) and then began a series of powerful novels ("Weapon Shops", "Weapon Makers", "Slan", "World of Null-A") which has only lately shown signs of diminishing.

In 1939, also, the second companion to Astounding was born: a magazine of fantasy entitled "Unknown". The first issue was dated March, 1939. Monthly, Unknown featured book-length fantasies.

1940 was a year of great serials. E.E. Smith's "Grey Lensman" was completed in January. February and March saw a mighty story by Heinlein, "If This Goes On--", followed by "Final Blackout", L. Ron Hubbard, in the April-May-June issues. Following that was "Crisis in Utopia" in July and August, and van Vogt's "Slan" in Sept. Oct. Nov. and Dec. issues. Five consecutive serials, all but one now in book form, and four adjudged by nearly all as classics! Short stories were above par also.

The logotype was changed in 1939, putting the "Astounding" in simple block letters  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, and the "Science-Fiction" in smaller letters, both superimposed on the painting, and, along the bottom of the cover, the lead story's title was printed on a colored strip.

In May 1940 it was once more changed, tho the logo remained the same. The lead story's title was printed in a colored box  $1" \times 3"$ , half on ~~the~~ the logo and half on the painting, along with the date. This cover arrangement was used until December 1941.

1941 continued a group of great stories, but there were no changes in format or staff. "Unknown" became a bi-monthly in February 1941, and continued as one until its death in October 1943. With the October 1941 issue, the name was changed to Unknown Worlds and the size was changed to  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ .

In January 1942, the first size change to come to Astounding since the trimmed edges in 1936 had lopped off half an inch arrived. The size was changed to  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$  and the wordage increased to nearly 110,000 words; the pages were cut to 130 in number. The cover painting was put in a frame between the logo and the story titles.

Astounding went along for 16 of the monstrous issues, until the paper shoetage cracked down in April 1943. The May 1943 issue was in the same size as that from 1936 through 1941. Only the backbone and logo design were different.

November 1943 issue was still another shock to Astounding's faithful: -the size had been reduced to approximately  $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ ! This was t h e

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smallest size the magazine had been in, and it retained that format until January 1947.

#### PART FOUR: THE DECLINE, 1943-1950

As the magazine had shrunk, the pages had increased, from 130 to 162 to finally 178 in the smallest size, (including 16 pages of rotogravure). Virtually the entire art staff drifted away to the army in 1943-44. William Timmins replaced Hubert Rogers as the cover artist and painted all but one cover from 1944 up to January 1947. Rogers returned in March of that year.

The outstanding stories of the dreary war years were Sturgeon's ~~XXXX~~ "Kill-Dozer" (Nov. 1944) and van Vogt's "World of Null-A" (Aug., Sep., Oct., 1945). Slowly the old writers returned and Campbell tried unsuccessfully to return Astounding to its former leadership.

With the February 1947 issue, the old bulk-pulp paper was discarded and Astounding became a semi-slick. The logotype had been changed in November 1946 to read "astounding SCIENCE FICTION" instead of "ASTOUNDING science fiction". March 1947 saw the end of the rotogravure section and the reduction of the magazine to 162 pages.

Since 1947, Campbell has tried to lift Astounding once more from a rut. He has developed many new authors; such people as Frank Robinson, Hohn D. MacDonald, Pour Anderson, Wilmar Shiras and Roger Flint Young have tried to assist the old guard. New artists were found: Brush, Ward and Quackenbush on the interior, Chesley Bonestell on the outside. Other promising cover artists were Alejandro, Zboyan and Santry. Now it is evident that Walt Miller, the latest artist on the staff, is being groomed to take over Rogers' place. Yet all of these have been unable to revive the pre-war Astounding greatness.

There have been occasional flashes of spirit-- Miller's artwork and stories like "Needle", "To The Stars" or "And Now You Don't" ..but ...on the whole, Astounding is obviously slipping.

The first open blast came when Redd Boggs, in the July 1950 Science-Fiction Newsletter, said, in effect, that Campbell's past with Astounding was glorious and his future was dim--Astounding needs a new editor to revive it!

Should the "Dianetics" ballyhoo be proven worthless, Campbell will be departing quickly. After resorting to such schemes as the Thio-timeline Hoax, the Predicted Issue (Nov. 1949) and the sensational introduction of Dianetics, Campbell is at the end of his string.

"A change" is promised shortly for Astounding, according to page 77 of the August 1950 issue. What that change will be has not yet been revealed. Despite a certain sameness in content, aSF has shown an awakening in recent issues. Let's hope that the one-time leader of the field of science-fiction will once more be able to present a steady stream of sf classics!

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Needless to say, the opinions expressed in the foregoing article are not necessarily those of the editor or publisher. (An appendix of odd facts concerning aSF may be found elsewhere in this issue.) -Ed.

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