A New Sort of Magazine

Amazing Stories vol. 1 no. 1

April 1926

DRAFT: *Please do not share without permission of the author. Typeset versions in web / pdf / doc*

ANOTHER fiction magazine!

At first thought it does seem impossible that there could be room for another fiction magazine in this country. The reader may well wonder, "Aren't there enough already, with the several hundreds now being published?" True.[1] But this is not "another fiction magazine," AMAZING STORIES is a *new* kind of fiction magazine! It is entirely new—entirely different—something that has never been done before in this country. Therefore, AMAZING STORIES deserves your attention and interest.

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

By "scientifiction" I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and

[1] Frank Munsey is generally credited with publishing the first pulp magazine in 1882, *Argosy*, "printing it on coarse paper and filling it with adventure stories for adults" (314). When Munsey estimated the size of the American magazine reading public, he put the number at 250,000 in 1893 and 750,000 in 1899. By 1947, a national survey of the Magazine Advertising Bureau found 32,300,000 "magazine reading families" in the United States. Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964). This rapid expansion of the magazine market meant that by the mid-1920s, the "several hundreds" of fiction magazines on the market were able to diversify into incredibly narrow niche publications "devoted to any and every genre and topic imaginable, such as *Courtroom Stories* (the first issue featured a cover story on the Oscar Wilde trials), *Football Action, Zeppelin Stories,* and *Gun Molls Magazine*" (75). For an account of how modernist literature worked not in opposition to but within this mass marketplace of popular fiction—"the material product, modernism in the marketplace, as found on the newsstand, in the drugstore, over the counter"—see David M. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form*, (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).

prophetic vision.[2] For many years stories of this nature were published in the sister magazines of AMAZING STORIES—"SCIENCE & INVENTION" and "RADIO NEWS."[3]

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

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

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

Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they

[2]Gernsback frequently cites Verne, Wells and Poe in his fiction magazine editorials as the founding figures of a scientifiction genre. This issue featured work by all three: Verne's *Off on a Comet, or Hector Servadac* (1877), Wells's "The New Accelerator" (1901), and Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845). But as Gary Westfahl points out—who sees this article as one of the first programmatic definitions of science fiction—Gernsback had a broader understanding of proto-science fictional texts in the nineteenth century. In addition to his appreciation for Luis Senarens and Clement Fezandié, Gernsback reprinted stories by Richard Adams, Fitz James O'Brien, and H. Rider Haggard, and frequently mentioned nineteenth century authors in the pages of *Amazing* such as Edward Bellamy (see below), Garrett P. Serviss, M.P. Shiel, and Arthur Conan Doyle. Contrary to later histories of science fiction that emphasized texts commenting on the social or political context from which they emerged, Gernsback's canon revolves around prognostication. Westfahl:

> In associating writers whose careers began in the 19th century with SF, Gernsback, unlike later historians, did not attribute their work to larger events in that era; they were rather persons ahead of their time, 'prophets' who anticipated both the value of scientific progress and the value of literature about scientific progress. All on his own, Poe 'conceive[d] the idea of a scientific story.' Thus, according to Gernsback, 19th-century SF was simply the product of isolated individual geniuses.

Gary Westfahl, "'The Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe Type of Story': Hugo Gernsback's History of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies*, 19, no. 3, (November 1992): 340–353, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240181, p. 342-3.

[3]For a complete bibliography of scientifiction stories published in the Gernsback magazines prior to *Amazing Stories,* see **The Evolution of Modern Science Fiction.**

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

And not only that! Poe, Verne, Wells, Bellamy, and many others have proved themselves real prophets.[4] Prophecies made in many of their most amazing stories are being realized—and have been realized. Take the fantastic submarine of Jules Verne's most famous story, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" for instance. He predicted the present day submarine almost down to the last bolt! New inventions pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow. Many great science stories destined to be of an historical interest are still to be written, and AMAZING STORIES magazine will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well.

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

Exclusive arrangements have already been made with the copyright holders of the entire voluminous works of ALL of Jules Verne's immortal stories.[5] Many of these stories are not known to the general American public yet. For the first time they will be within easy reach of every reader through AMAZING STORIES. A number of German, French and English stories of this kind by the best writers in their respective countries, have already been contracted for and we hope very shortly to be able to enlarge the magazine and in that way present always more material to our readers.

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

[4]Refers to Edward Bellamy, American author of the best-selling socialist utopia *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888).

[5]The cover to this first issue of *Amazing Stories* features an illustration of Verne's *Off On a Comet.* Mike Ashley argues that leading with this novel was probably solely to gain name recognition, as it was "arguably one of Verne's least scientifically plausible novels. Gernsback admits so in his introductory blurb: '...the author here abandons his usual scrupulously scientific attitude and gives his fancy freer rein.' " Mike Ashley, *The Gernsback Days: A Study of the Evolution of Modern Science Fiction from 1911 to 1936*, 1st Wildside Press Edition edition., (Holicong, PA: Wildside Press, 2004), p. 78.