

THE PULP FILE

by Don Hutchison

Man Of Tomorrow

Edmond Hamilton was born October 21, 1904 in Youngston, Ohio and was raised on a nearby farm. In his youth he witnessed horses rear up in buggy shafts at the sight of an automobile. In his mature years he was present when Apollo 12 departed on a tail of flame and thunder, outward bound for the moon.

Hamilton was one of the grand Old Masters of the science fiction pulps, one of a handful of future-think wordsmiths who, in order to eke out even a modest existence, were forced to write and sell reams of material to a small and relatively obscure market.

He was almost the perfect pulpster. His imaginative action-packed space operas just about jumped off the page with writer-to-reader urgency. He once recalled how, in putting the finishing touches to an epic space battle, he had become so excited that as he punched his typewriter the machine "walked" over the surface of his old flat-topped desk – with the writer following it, banging away at it as he finished his climatic scene.

Such stuff wasn't meant to be great literature, but his readers caught the excitement. The Edmond Hamilton byline sold magazines.

As a full-time pulp writer Hamilton worked other fiction categories: mystery, detective, horror and straight ad-venture; but his eyes were on the stars and his heart belonged to space.

When he was young the term science fiction did not exist – it had yet to be invented – but the precious farm lad devoured the scientific romances of **H.G. Wells** and **Jules Verne** and later snapped up copies of such pulps as **All-Story** and **Argosy** when they featured the fantastic serials of such pioneers as **Edgar Rice Burroughs** and **Ray Cummings**.

As Hamilton recalled it in a fan magazine essay published in 1934: "I have been a strong science

fiction fan since 1916, when I started in with the old **Argosy** tales of Burroughs, **Julian Hawthorne** and others. I had a newspaper route about that time and when Merritt's long-awaited sequel to "The Moon Pool" came out, I carried papers one night each week with the **All-Story Magazine** held three inches before my eyes, avoiding automobiles and street-cars by the grace of God and heaving every paper on the wrong porch."

At an early age he determined to become a professional writer himself and devote his own life to entertaining people, as he had been entertained, with yarns of derring-do on far planets and wondrous worlds. At the time of that momentous decision he had no idea that science fiction was about to become a category in its own right and would eventually encompass scores of magazines specializing in just that sort of fiction.

When Edmond Hamilton's first pulp yarn appeared in the August 1926 issue of **Weird Tales**, science fiction magazines were just five-months old (**Amazing Stories**, April 1926 was the first). Hamilton's initial venture into sf, bearing the simplistic title "Across Space", was published only a month later. Within a short time he was routinely selling stories that took men out beyond the planets to the stars, then to other galaxies, and finally outside the known universe altogether.

As **Sam Moskowitz** pointed out in his book **SEEKERS OF TOMORROW**, Hamilton was probably one of the most underestimated (although certainly not unappreciated) writers of science fiction. Author of the **Captain Future** stories, Ed's adventure novels earned him the nickname "World-Saver" (or alternatively, "World-Wrecker") Hamilton, due to his penchant for smashing planets and stars around like so many billiard balls. Story titles such as "Crashing Suns" and "The Universe Wreckers" amply prove this. If characterization was weak in his early stories, Ed made up for it with his imaginative ideas and express-train narrative drive. Many of his concepts were innovative

and were often "rediscovered" by other writers in later years.

Among the concepts pioneered by Hamilton was the theme of interstellar adventure itself; the notion of a galactic empire complete with its own law-and-order Interstellar Patrol; the Fortean concept of Earth as property; the evolution of plant life and the evolution of entire worlds; along with the concept of speeded-up evolution; the employment of absolute darkness as a weapon; the use of ancient mythology as a basis for sf; the idea of recruiting people from different time periods; aliens in metal bodies; creatures of flame; matter transmitters; and the introduction of floating cities; and animals with human intelligence. There were many, many others.

In that same 1934 fan article, Hamilton described his basic working methods: "I sometimes write down an interesting title and then work up a story from it ... At other times a passage or note in a scientific work will suggest a story. I can do nothing with a yarn until I have the end of it in mind. Time of writing is widely variable – I've done 10,000 word stories in two days, and then again I've worked on a so and so of the same length for four full months."

"I write a first draft and as I go along change the plot, characters, and settings to suit the developments. Then go over it and chop it up with pencil and make a final draft. Tried sending out first draft stuff a few years back, but found it contained too many slips and that I didn't have enough control over the development of the story."

"I get keenly interested in a science-fiction story once I've started it, and in fact, I can't imagine anyone writing this kind of fiction who isn't a bug on it ... I think the chief value of science-fiction is not so much that it imparts scientific information as that it gives the reader an interest in science. It tends to make him think of science, not as something dry and repellent, but as something that is pregnant with many interesting and exciting possibilities for man's future."

As his career progressed, the old superscience melodramas gave way to more thoughtful stories in which depth of characterization and emotional drives became prominent. Hamilton proved he could write as sophisticated a story as the next man and some of his short stories from his later period are small masterpieces.

Ironically, we seldom choose our own monument. In 1940 (at a time when a new and more mature kind of science fiction was about to be developed by men like **Heinlein**, **Asimov**, and **Sturgeon**) Edmond Hamilton was assigned the job of writing a series of booklength novels for a brand new pulp magazine: **Captain Future**. The new magazine was designed to carry breathless adventures of a futuristic **Doc Savage**-type superhero, aimed mainly at teenagers.

Seventeen issues of **Captain Future**, **Man of Tomorrow**, were issued between 1940 and 1944, and fifteen of the novels were written by Hamilton. After the magazine folded due to war-time paper shortages three more Captain Future novels were published in **Startling Stories**, one of the publisher's companion magazines. In 1950 the character was revived once again for a series of seven novelets in **Startling Stories**. They were the final curtain call for Captain Future (Curtis Newton) and his three bizarre assistants, Grag the robot, Otho the android, and Simon Wright, the Brain – a living human brain imprisoned forever within a transparent, indestructible case.

Captain Future was not Edmond Hamilton's own creation. Legend has it that he was given the assignment for the series while attending The First World Science Fiction Convention in New York City, July 2, 1939. **Leo Margulies**, editorial director for **Standard Magazines**, was also at the convention and had been impressed by the enthusiasm of the early science fiction fans. Margulies vowed on the spot to create a new pulp hero magazine aimed at younger readers in an effort to win them over to the new brand of future fiction. He reasoned that this innovation would do for science fiction what **The Shadow** had done for mystery and what Doc Savage had done for adventure.

Originally the new magazine was to be called **Mr. Future ... Wizard of Science**. Hamilton was supplied a story and character outline by the publishers. In the publishers' outline Curt Newton was not just a man of heroic proportions but a biological mutant born of radioactive emanations, like some monster in a 1950's horror flick. Hamilton found the outline unusable and was forced to go to New York and argue with the publishers for days until the proposed set-up was changed to his liking. Eventually the character – now called Captain Future – emerged in a form acceptable to Hamilton, his publishers, and their suitably impressed young readers.

Hamilton called the first novel, "The Horror on Jupiter," but that title was changed to "Captain Future and the Space Emperor," as the editors decided that they should capitalize on the Captain Future name.

In that opening number Curt Newton was immediately set up as the hero of all the worlds. The reactions of mere mortals was nothing short of idolatrous. A strapping red-haired scientific adventurer, Captain Future was the past's future crime fighter, an implacable Nemesis of all oppressors and exploiters of the System's human and planetary races. Whenever a menace threatened to conquer, enslave, or destroy hapless Mankind, the President of Terra had but to send out a distress call to the good Captain's secret base on the moon (a kind of extended bat-signal) and Captain Future would zoom out, proton pistol blazing, to do battle with the wicked.

In one form or another, the Captain Future series ran for twelve years and almost a million words. Because of low pay and rushed deadlines Hamilton was forced to write most of the early books in first draft only. When he caught his breath he began to give them more care and an increasing amount of inventive vitality. Eventually he took the good Captain and his aides outside the Universe itself to the very birthplace of creation – where Captain Future had to wrestle with the temptation of his own godhood. No pulp hero could go farther.

Few would claim that the saga of Captain Future represented the best of Edmond Hamilton's work. Despite his preference for action-oriented fiction, Hamilton was a mature and sensitive man. Of his 300 published works he is best remembered for such emotionally moving short story classics as "Requiem" and "He That Hath Wings," and at least one novel, "Star Kings," which appears to be an enduring favorite with readers of all generations. Most of his later novels ("City at World's End," "The Star of Life") are examples of science fiction at its adventuresome best.

All of the Captain Future novels were republished by Popular Library in the late 1960's. Hamilton received no royalties for the reprints but they

did serve to introduce Captain Future to a new generation of fans. These books are still to be found in used book stores. They are worth collecting, not only for the Hamilton stories, but because three of the cover paintings are by Frank Frazetta, and another is by Jeff Jones. (The rest of the covers are pretty dreadful.)

While the Captain Future novels were aimed at a younger audience than most science fiction magazines, the author's fecund imagination and zest for story telling insured that they were great fun to experience. As a result they have survived for nearly half a century and are still being read today. Who can say how many young readers were influenced by them and went on to help shape the very future they dreamed about? There are no statistics on such things,

A few years before his death in 1977 Ed Hamilton and his wife Leigh Brackett (a much-loved pulp author in her own right) were invited to sit in the reporters' press box at Cape Kennedy and they watched Apollo 12 take off for the moon. Ed later wrote about his reactions to the take-off:

"If anyone at that moment had asked me, 'Was it worthwhile to spend 44 years writing science fiction?' I would have unhesitatingly answered 'Yes'. For I feel we had a part ... a very tiny part ... in this. We did not plan or build or launch this craft. We only dreamed about it. But perhaps the dreams helped a little to create a climate in which it **could** be planned and launched and built ..."

"Without a single exception all of my oldest friends, and some of them go back forty years, are science fictionists. Many others who were friends are now gone. And as the rocket soared up into the clouds, I found myself thinking of them all ... looking back to the days when we were all looking forward, when we met in tiny groups and tried to peer into the future, discussed it, argued about it, and attempted awkwardly to put it into fiction. And it did not seem to me, with that thunder still echoing in my ears, that what we did or tried to do was completely unworthy."

Who is to say where imagination ends and reality begins?