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# SATELLITE

*science fiction*

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**Short Novel**

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**SISTER PLANET . . . . . Poul Anderson**

*Earth's bright evening star seemed to whisper: "Venus has a life of its own which must be respected. If you turn it into another Earth . . . human dignity will be imperilled!"*

4

**A Classic Novelet**

---

**THE WOMAN OF THE WOOD . . . . . A. Merritt**

*The wood was terrifyingly alive! But there was unearthly beauty in its dark enchantment, too . . . a trembling of the veil.*

49

**Short Stories**

---

**E GUBLING DOW . . . . . Gordon R. Dickson**

*The egg came from another world . . . with a tragic human message.*

21

**APPROPRIATION . . . . . Robert Silverberg**

*The aliens had so much sympathy it spilled over . . . dangerously.*

35

**GRAPH . . . . . Stanley G. Weinbaum**

*The tired executive's medical checkup was strange indeed.*

59

**Feature Articles**

---

**DAWN OF FLAME . . . . . Sam Moskowitz**

*Stanley G. Weinbaum chartered new frontiers in science fiction. A discerning analysis of a brilliantly original writer.*

28

**SALUTE TO ROBIDA . . . . . Don Glassman**

*A great Frenchman who foresaw today's scientific miracles.*

42

**FEAR OF SPACE . . . . . Ellery Lanier**

*Future spacemen will face a major hazard . . . within themselves.*

46

**YOUR SPACE . . . . . The Readers**

*A page of lively reader discussion . . . a new department.*

61

LEO MARGULIES, Publisher

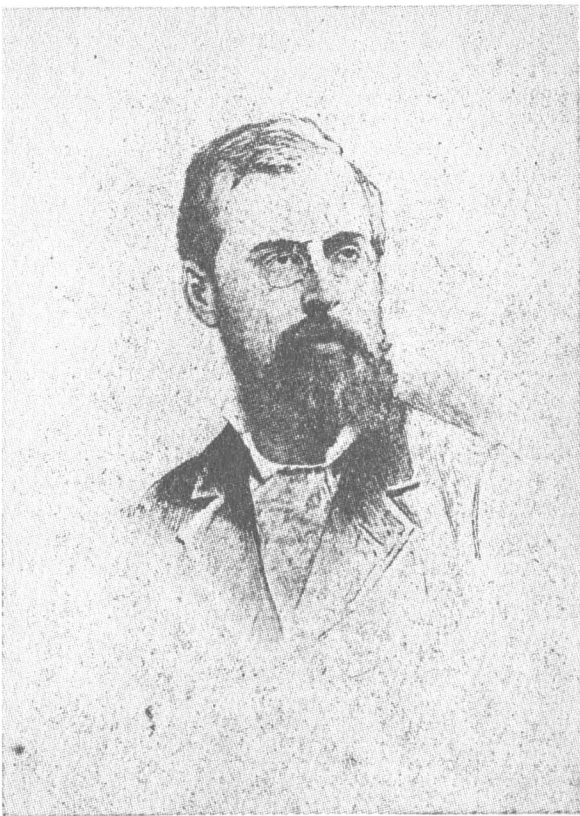
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**ALBERT ROBIDA**

# SALUTE TO ROBIDA

**MASTERMIND OF SCIENCE FICTION**

by **DON GLASSMAN**

*It has often been said that a prophet is seldom held in honor by the country of his birth. But that ancient and enduring truism could just as appropriately be re-phrased to read: "A prophet is seldom honored by the age his wisdom helped to make great." The amazing Robida was a case in point.*

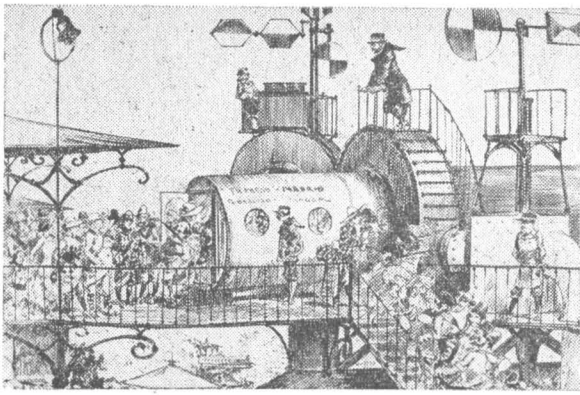
**T**HE SIXTH DECADE of the twentieth century seems to be a ripe time and a good place to write one man's name in bold letters across the page—

## **ALBERT ROBIDA**

Much of the "impossible" world he conceived in the nineteenth century is the world we know today or will know in the near future.

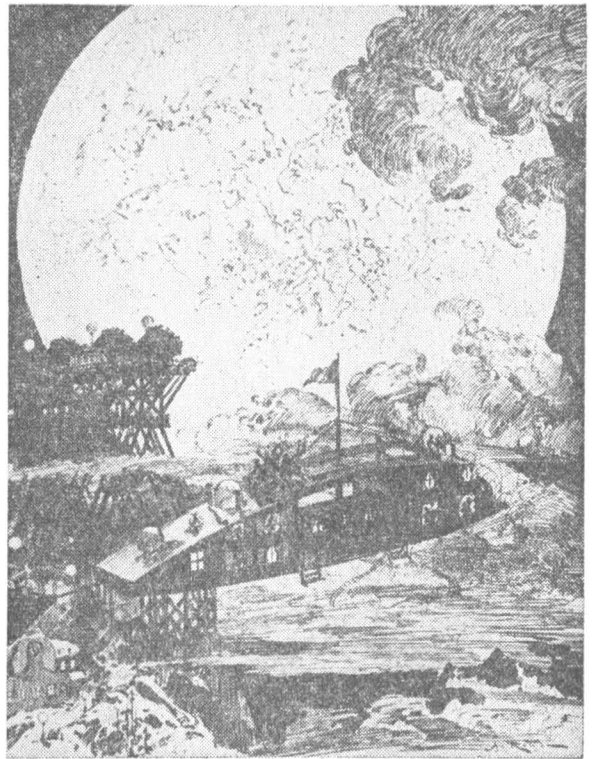
First let's establish this unusual man's identity: Our mastermind of science fiction and art lived in France between 1848 and 1926. He produced prodigious quantities of serious art, literature and so-called "scientific nonsense." He attracted wide attention in his native country, but far less world fame than his eminent contemporary Jules Verne.

When we compare their works, it can hardly be denied that Verne excelled Robida as a writer of entertainment for the sake of entertainment. Ro-



### TRAVELING DE LUXE

All aboard for the Madrid-Gibraltar-Tanger Express! This could be an aerial torpedo train which travels through an elevated tube before diving under the ocean at the Straits of Gibraltar and presto! you are in the North African metropolis of Tangers. The departure has all the excitement and gayety of a ship sailing.



### ALL ABOARD FOR THE MOON

Spaceship flights to the great Earth Satellite are a commonplace in Robida's concept of the 20th century. Here you see the takeoff. The skipper sits in his transparent (plexiglass?) bubble and the passengers on the poop deck bid goodbye to their Earthbound friends. Note the battery of incandescent lights on the left. These high-intensity lamps would make Hollywood's producers glow with envy. With such "kliegs" they could film the nearby planets from one of Robida's spaceships. Anyway, here is an idea to mull over when the conversation at Mike Romanoff's grows dull.

.....

bida worked for his "sacred cause"—he wanted to warn humanity that the age of science and electricity would fan the fires of war and the ambitions of dictators.

Long before the Space Age Maestro Robida wrote: "Peace on Earth is old-fashioned. We must also worry about peace on Earth and in the air."

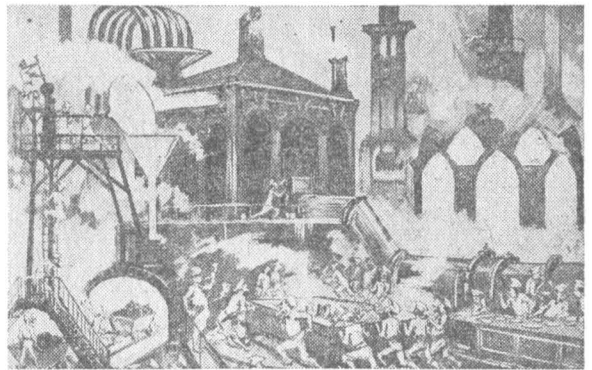
This simple prophecy, with its dire implications, was set down by Robida almost eighty years ago.

With his uncanny imaginative discernment he described space flights, anti-aircraft gunnery, aerial attacks, armor-plated warplanes, underground and submarine warfare. One-man submarines, multi-cannon machine guns and bacteriological warfare were part of the grim picture which he painted for his often utterly incredulous contemporaries. Of course his prophetic vision took in much more than the art of waging war. He drew blue-prints of numerous developments that have materialized in all but a few minor particulars since his death.

Frequently I run across news items which remind me that one more Robida prophecy has come true. International television, for instance. The modern science of meteorology and its valiant efforts to control and manipulate our climate is another prophecy which is rapidly becoming a reality.

Certain highly technical and practical aspects of science also appear with great frequency in the fiction of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edward Bellamy. But so far as I can determine no writer, artist, scientist or poet since Leonardo da Vinci can match the accuracy of Robida's predictions. The materialism, tempo and psychology of our age were set forth with realistic accuracy by Robida in the 1880's.

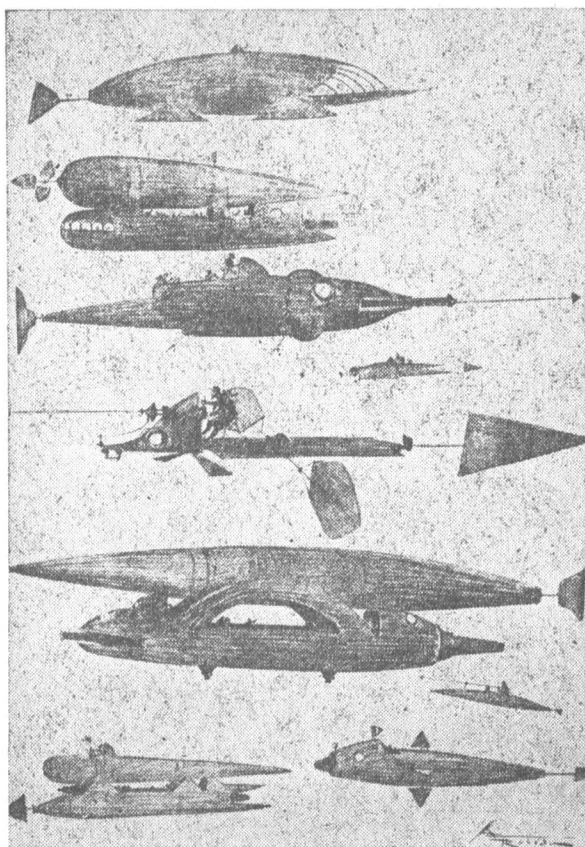
How did he manage to visualize the future with such clarity? The superstitious would call it black magic. My own belief is that he prognosticated



### WHAT'S COOKING?

Nineteenth Century dining was a leisurely pastime. Every meal was cooked and served to order. But 20th century eating, prophesied Robida, will become an industry wherein the preparation of food will be on a hitherto undreamed-of scale. The food factory shown here is the nearest thing to an automated plant. Soup travels through a large-diameter pipeline. The ingredients are added to the pot with the help of a power ladle. A bugler times the activities of the food-handlers. Half a dozen food-tasters sample the results before the end-products are passed on to the consumer.

Photos Courtesy of Don Glassman



#### THE SHAPE OF SHIPS TO COME

Twenty years before the first engine-powered flight by the Wright Brothers in North Carolina, Robida published this assortment of high-speed jet-powered, military aircraft. Long before the wind tunnel was invented, Robida seemed to understand the principle of streamlining. Note the absence of propellers. The projecting objects or vanes were probably intended as stabilizers and rudder devices. Several of these aircraft mount cannons fore and aft.



#### FOR TIRED MUSEUM FEET

Flat feet, corns and bunions won't bother you when you take an art tour of the Louvre on this rolling conveyance. Footsore camera-bugs, weary of hauling heavy equipment, go along for the ride. Note the loudspeaker in the lower left hand corner. This delights sightseers with a running commentary concerning the painters and the museum masterpieces. The basic idea of a mobile audience was used to good advantage in the Futurama Exhibit at the New York World's Fair. Recorded art lectures are now available to sightseers visiting the National Gallery in Washington.

from clues. How else, for instance, can we explain Robida's masterful blue-print of present-day television developments?

Circa 1884 a German named Paul Gottlieb Nipkow (1860-1940) conceived the mechanical scanning disc, forerunner of the modern electronic TV scanner. Nipkow's crude invention may have planted a fertile idea in Robida's mind. If so, this idea took root in soil of a unique texture and sprouted into some incredible imaginative concepts. Taken altogether they constitute a major milestone for the then unheard-of television art and industry.

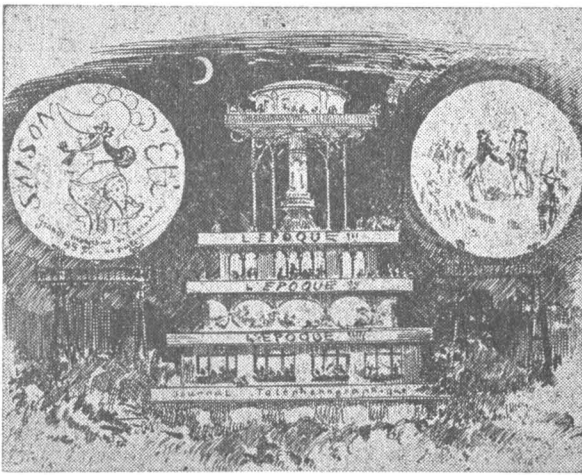
Robida conceived TV spectacles of such ingenuity, variety and brilliance that the programmers of the Twentieth Century have virtually nothing additional to contribute. Television operas, TV advertising, TV coverage of battlefronts, TV education and instruction, TV special events

and TV stage dramas—all were described by Robida. A good many TV executives and directors who have basked in the sunlight of publicity for their alleged achievements in TV programming would undoubtedly like us to forget Albert Robida.

Just as Edison's first electric lamps began to flicker over the sidewalks of New York Robida charted the outlines of what he called the Electric Age, replete with motorized traffic, large-scale industrialization and push-button living.

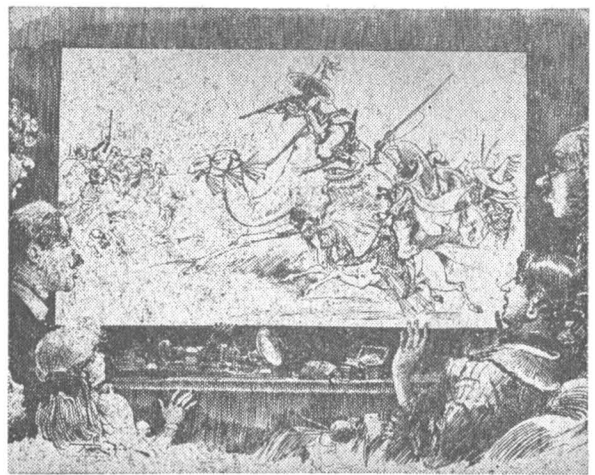
H. G. Wells and Jules Verne found science fiction a good vehicle for Utopian idealism. Robida however used the medium as a sounding board for his alarm and cynicism concerning the future turn of events.

With words and pictures Robida made a double-barreled assault on the twentieth century. Despite his artistic inclinations and his love for the cultural heritage of Europe, he prophesied that science



### TIMES SQUARE TOMORROW?

One day—and sooner than you think—some smart showman or chief of the “Creative Department” of an advertising agency will capitalize on this magnificent pipe-dream conjured up by Albert Robida. The tower is the editorial central of *THE EPOCH*—a “telephonographic” newspaper. Our modern translation would be radio-TV journal. *THE EPOCH* neither prints nor publishes—it visualizes news events and advertising on giant TV screens placed high where they can be seen by people on the ground. Now that we have given the TV advertising boys an idea, we trust they will remember screen credit.



### TELEVISION GOES TO WAR

In the 1880's this TV pickup of a North African battle-scene made Frenchmen wonder whether Albert Robida was insane. But in many predictions of things to come Science Fiction Writer-Artist Robida outsmarted his skeptical contemporaries. For the past ten years the French themselves have been embroiled in the North African brush wars. Arab mounts—horses and camels—still are used by the rebel forces. However, the large-size home TV screen is something that has not materialized . . . but TV screens with life-size figures are commonly used in closed-circuit theater TV.



would eventually doom the simple pastoral life. The hidden wealth of the world, the shifting boundaries of nations and the ambitions of dictators would inspire endless wars and disputes.

Robida dreaded this future, with its power politics, blitzkriegs and mass destruction. He was quite sure it would put an end to the age of chivalrous legends, poetry and art for art's sake. The Scientific Age, as he envisioned it, promised dubious pleasures and precarious living.

There are several points of similarity between Robida and Leonardo da Vinci. Both were artists. Both were catholic in their tastes and prophetic in their thinking. Indubitably da Vinci was the greater scientist. His notebooks are filled with mechanical devices and anatomical sketches. Robida's notebooks are filled with old castles, chivalrous legends and classical beauty. When he resorted to prophecy, he frequently reduced his art to caricature,

and satire, for which he had a natural bent.

In science fiction the writer and artist have left us a legacy of outstanding creative brilliance which is neither pure science nor pure fiction. Today we accept it as pure entertainment. But much of what Robida turned out was considered pure nonsense in his own day and age. He caricatured the twentieth century with vitriolic humor and gave graphic glimpses of it which appeared as “impossible” to his contemporaries as the twenty-first century which science fiction writers are describing today.

“Science,” said Robida, “is like a flood, spreading evenly over the globe and placing everyone on the same plane, so to speak. The remote peoples were unable to compete before but now they have the same engines and explosives.”

The great prophet died in 1926. We are still looking for the proverbial peace on Earth; and now we are looking for it in the air as well.