

LANGE STAR

Sky Ranger

CORNERSTONE BOOK PUBLISHERS



Airship 27 Presents
"LANCE STAR: Sky Ranger" Volume 1
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Introducing **LANCE STAR: SKY RANGER**

by Norman Hamilton

In the summer of 1936 a new flying hero magazine was created called *Lance Star: Sky Ranger*. It was produced by the small time Canadian publisher, Dutton Press out of Ontario. Manager Editor, Saul Kingman, wanted a monthly to compete with the flying titles popping up all over the U.S. He wanted a title that would join the ranks of such heroes as *G-8, Dusty Ayers & Bill Barnes*.

Kingman hired pulp writer Owen Brown to create the new series. He would write 36 of the 48 *Lance Star* adventures that were presented as being penned by Chance Hunter.

Owen was the oldest son of Colonel Charles “Chuck” Brown who had flown with the French Squadrons in World War I and was the youngest pilot to have achieved ace status.

Owen, and his two brothers were all accomplished fliers by the time they left high school.

Owen Brown was a capable writer, having worked in New York City for many years contributing to many pulps of various genres. When he received the offer from Kingman, it didn’t take him long to pack his bags and head north.

Initially there was some discussion about making *Lance Star* a Canadian, but the publisher, Roland Duquette, nixed that idea immediately. He wanted the new series to attract American readers. To have the same theme of patriotism the other series catered to. The rest was left to Brown’s imagination. He set about swiping every conceivable concept he could find.

Lance Star is a blond-haired, handsome fellow who owns and operates an airfield outside of New York City. It was clearly modeled after the real Bennet Field in Long Island. He, like Doc Savage, was a genius inventor and his adventures always spotlighted some kind of new, fantastic aircraft. Although he had a home base, Lance's adventure took him all over the globe. The more exotic the locations, the wilder the tales.

He, too, was surrounded by a group of flying companions. Several of these, Buck Tellonger, Jack Falcone, and Walt Anderson were all older veterans who had flown in World War I. Red Davis was Lance's boyhood chum. Not only had they grown up together, but both had gone to flight school together. Then there was sophisticated Jim Nolan, a British flyer who signed up with Star because he craved adventure. The youngest member of Star's outfit was Skip Terrel. Lance was romantically involved with Skip's older sister, Betty.

Like all classic heroes, Star also had several colorful arch rivals. The deadliest of these was the Austrian, Baron Otto Von Blood. More on him in a bit. But the one villain who made the most appearances in the series was fellow American ace turned mercenary, Morgan Jones. Jones was a spoiled rich kid from California who grew up looking for cheap thrills anywhere he could find them. Using his family's wealth, he hired a squadron of rogue pilots whose only loyalty was to him. Star first encountered Morgan Jones in China, where he was working for an opium warlord, helping him to transport his deadly cargo to major eastern ports. Titled "*The Angel of Death*" and dated April 1937, it proved to be one of the most popular episodes in the magazine's history. At the end of the tale, Jones managed to escape Star and the Sky Rangers, vowing to return some day.

Now known by that very title, at reader demand, the character would come back to plague the Sky Rangers in a total of eight adventures.

During 1937 and 1938, the series did extremely well, holding its own in sales figures against its American competitors. The flying craze inspired by real-life heroes like Charles Lindbergh and Wiley Post kept the public reading by the thousands. There were even Lance Star Flying Clubs started all over America and Canada. But like all popular fads, it too began to wane and sales started to slack off.

Nothing unusual for big publishers, but for a little outfit like Dutton, it was a very serious matter. In a desperate attempt to shake things up, Kingman and Brown decided to kill off one of Star's crew. They chose Skip. The hue and cry of the readers was overwhelming.

The Dutton offices were flooded for months after "*Red Skies Over The Rhine*," dated Feb. 1939, appeared on the stands. In the story, Lance and Skip travel to Germany at the government's request. There they discover the Blood Baron has assembled a secret air corps with the latest innovations at his disposal. His dream is to reclaim the lost glories of the Fatherland. The story foreshadowed the birth of the Luftwaffe and eventual rise of the Third Reich. Brown, like all his peers, was well aware of the world situation and the rumblings from overseas. In the climax, the Baron is about to shoot Lance in the back when Skip steps between them and takes the bullet meant for his friend. Lance spins around and shoots the Baron. Skip dies in his arms. It was heavy drama.

Although vehemently denouncing the death of one of their favorite characters, the readers came back and sales remained steady until the start of World War II. Saul Kingman passed away in 1943 of a heart attack. His replacement was Mort Brubaker, who would stay with the title until it folded in 1944. He and Brown never got along. Tired of constant rewrites Brubaker would impose on him, Owen left the series. He was replaced by several well known pulp writers; among them Paul Chadwick and Edward Olsen.

Brown and his brothers, John and Dale, all went to England and joined the RAF, where they distinguished themselves fighting against the Blitzkrieg. Captain John Brown was shot down over France in November of 1944.

After the war, a decorated Owen Brown returned to his hometown of Jericho, New York where he married Barbara Sinclair. Finding most of the pulps had died out while he was overseas, Brown decided to try his hand at journalism and was hired by the *Jericho Tribune*. He never gave up his love of flying and he and brother Dale began the Long Island Bombers, a club for flying enthusiasts.

In 1949, Owen, Barbara and their first child, Grace, moved to Quincy, Massachusetts, where Brown took over as Managing Editor of the *Quincy Monitor*; a position he would hold for the twenty years



Owen Brown, c. 1937

until his retirement in 1979. He and Barbara had a total of three children; Grace, Claire and Daniel. During his later years, Owen was contacted by many pulp fans and did many interviews for various fanzines. Barbara says he toyed with the idea of writing an autobiography, but in the end thought it would be a waste of time, that no one was interested in the life of an ex-pulp writer-aviator.

Owen Brown died November 5th, 1986 at the age of 73.

As for Dutton Press, they continued to exist publishing women's titles and true crime periodicals. In 1965 the company closed its doors for the last time, unable to compete with the flashier US magazines. Henri Duquette, the only son of the company's founder, continued to manage the properties. After the sale of the factory and presses, he sold all magazine rights to NeverEnding Concepts, a New Hampshire based Multi-Media group. The rights to *Lance Star-Sky Ranger* and a dozen other popular pulp characters were renewed at that time. This volume was first published with their kind permission.

In 2007, the rights to *Lance Star-Sky Ranger* were transferred to writer Bobby Nash of Atlanta, GA. This new edition is published with his gracious support.

‡ *Lance Star* ‡

***Attack of the
Bird Man***

**by
Frank Dirscherl**

Chapter 1

Lance Star groaned, lifted his head and peered through bleary eyes. He thought he'd heard a noise, heard something—or someone—interrupting him from his deserved gloom. He saw nothing, and plopped back down on his bunk. It had been months since the youngest member of his flying squadron, Skip Terrel, had perished, and Lance had spent his whole time since then in mourning. In reality, he'd done nothing at all, and the rest of his team had long expressed their grave concerns for him.

“Damn it, Lance, get up!” ordered Buck Tellonger who, along with the rest of the team—Red Davis, James Nolan and Kevin McDouglas—stood inside the door of the living room of Lance's bungalow on Star Field, Long Island.

“Get the hell out of here,” Lance said in a raised voice, without moving from his bunk.

“Look at him,” Buck snorted, “he can't even deign to look at us.”

At this, Lance sat up, and stared at the sight of his squadron angrily staring at him. “What are you all doing here? I told you I didn't want to be disturbed.”

“For five months?” asked Buck, incredulous. “You've neglected your duties, you've neglected your friends.”

Lance shot upright, furious. He rubbed the full beard he had allowed to grow during his inertia. “How dare you judge me! We lost one of our own...Skip...” His voice drifted off into sorrow.

“Look,” Buck started, clearly the designated leader of the group, “we all loved the lad. We all miss him. But, you can’t go on like this. You’re letting yourself, and everything around you, fall apart. Skip wouldn’t have wanted you to kill yourself with grief.”

Lance stood there, his mind reeling. A moment more of confusion, then he came to himself, realized blankly that it was almost as though he had been staring through his teammates rather than at them. Finally, he responded. “Maybe you’re right,” he said weakly. He rubbed his eyes and ran his fingers through his unkempt hair. “I just don’t know anymore.”

Kevin, the old Scotsman who was Lance’s head technician, moved alongside Lance and helped him sit back down on his bunk. “It’s okay, Lance, it’s okay. We’re here for you, you can turn to us.”

Lance turned to face his old friend. “Thank you,” he said, and smiled wanly. Jim Nolan sat down on Lance’s other side, and offered a reassuring hand.

“We’ve managed—just—to keep everything afloat in your absence... but, you need to pull yourself together, for our sake as well as yours,” said Buck.

Buck started to move slowly toward Lance, when Tony Lamport, the chief radio operator and superintendent of communications on Star Field, burst in, frantic, panting uncontrollably.

“Tony, what the hell?!” Buck said angrily.

“The radio...it’s all over the radio,” was all Tony could get out, indicating the wireless on the nearby sideboard.

Carrot-topped Red Davis was nearest the wireless, and he quickly switched it on. The frenzied tones of the newscaster blurted out the following: “The seaside town of Sarrayota in Northern California has experienced a remarkable and shocking series of events. Birds of every size and variety have attacked the town and its people. Details are still sketchy, but we’re getting reports of at least some people being injured in the attack, and authorities are mystified to explain the cause. And now to local news—”

Red Davis switched the wireless off. Everyone was stunned by the news, and looked to Lance, if not for an explanation, then for some sign or direction. Lance sat there, stone-faced. After months

of lethargy, months of feeling nothing but pain and sorrow and guilt, now Lance felt another strong emotion welling inside him. He'd often wondered if he would ever feel anything but grief again. He had his answer.

"Well," Kevin said, finally breaking the silence of the moment, "that was rather shocking."

Lance stood abruptly, catching everyone off guard. "Get the Skybolt ready. I'm heading for California." And he strode from the room into the adjoining suite without saying another word.

* * * * *

The squadron members, now alone in the bungalow, looked to each other with perplexed glances. Buck shrugged his shoulders, as if to say how should I know what's going on?

"At least he's up and moving," Buck said. "Let's just go with it, this may be the best thing for him."

The squadron dispersed, eager to do as Lance bade, ready to accept Buck's word on the subject. Buck remained behind, wanting to talk further with Lance. An instant later, and Lance appeared from the suite, outfitted in his usual flying garb. Apart from the thick beard he still wore, he looked his usual self—strong, tall, determined, albeit a little red-eyed. Buck couldn't help but smile.

"I can't tell you how good it is to see you like this again, Lance," he said. "There was a time when I never thought I'd see you in action again."

Lance stopped short, and smiled briefly at his Chief of Staff. "I want you with me, Buck."

Buck took Lance's arm, sat him down on the bunk. "Are you sure you want to rush off like this? Are you sure you're not replacing one extreme situation for another?"

Lance looked squarely into Buck's eyes. "Would that be so bad? I would have thought you'd be happy to have something take my mind off...off..." He couldn't go any further.

"I am, I am. I just...I just want you to be ready for this. You've barely moved from this bungalow in months. You're under done,"

Buck said.

Lance stood, determination etched into his handsome features. He headed for the front door. “No time. You heard the report. We need to get over there as quickly as possible to start an investigation.”

“But we don’t know that there’s a need for an investigation. This could be a one-off, this could be nothing at all. Perhaps the authorities already have the situation well in hand,” Buck said, following Lance out into the sunshine of a beautiful summer day.

“No, my gut tells me otherwise,” said Lance, walking toward the main hangar on Star Field. “I can’t explain it, but all I know is that I need to get over to Sarrayota and check this out personally.”

And that was that as far as Buck was concerned.

* * * * *

Entering the hangar, the Skybolt rolled toward them, being pulled along by a truck driven by Red and Kevin.

“She’s all ready, Lance,” Kevin called out, beaming proudly. As Lance’s head technician and chief mechanic, it was his responsibility to ensure all of Lance’s planes and equipment were well maintained. The silver Skybolt shone with a brilliance all its own.

“Buck’s coming with me,” Lance stated, as Buck retreated to the rear of the hangar to get ready for the trip.

“Lance, you sure you don’t want to try the new Pacer? She’s complete and fully tested,” Kevin said of the futuristic new plane Lance had designed and built. “She’s a real beauty and made for speed.”

“No, I need the Skybolt’s new fuel capabilities for such a long trip. Besides, I feel more comfortable with her.”

Kevin nodded, paused briefly before speaking up. “Lance, do you think this is the right thing to do right now?” Kevin asked.

Lance raised his hands in a stop signal. “Buck and I have gone through this. We’re going.”

The flying ace walked past the truck, toward his Skybolt. As the sun now caught the side of the craft, reflecting sharply off the shiny new paintwork, Lance briefly inspected the plane’s onboard

weaponry, which was considerable.

“Have the new fuel tanks been installed?” he asked Kevin.

“Installed, though not fully tested yet. It took us so long to connect the three new auxiliary tanks to the main tank...we just haven’t been able to properly test her in the air yet.”

“Today’s a good day for it,” Lance said, as he stepped up to and plopped into the pilot’s seat. He’d invented a new fuel system not long before Skip’s death, one that enabled the Skybolt to remain in the air for much longer periods than it ordinarily would be able to without need for refueling. Located near the rear of the plane, three new fuel tanks, which would pump fuel into the main tank automatically as that tank began to run dry. It was a unique and totally beneficial invention of Lance’s that, amongst most other things in his life, he’d forced from his mind during his months of grief. The flying ace had confidence in his own abilities and that of Kevin. He had no doubt the new fuel system would work as designed and built.

“Well, everything looks just fine and dandy,” Buck said, now outfitted in his flight-wear. He climbed into the other seat and got comfortable.

“Keep an eye on things here,” Lance said to Red, who had remained close by. “I have this horrible feeling this bird attack is only the beginning.”

Chapter 2

The Skybolt cut through the air like a mechanized knife through butter, its central propeller making quick work of the incredible distance already traveled. Over a picturesque mix of farmland, forests, mountains and towns, Lance and Buck whizzed by, intent on discovering what they could in the village of Sarrayota.

As they sped westward, now soaring 25,000 feet above the plains of Iowa, Lance heard Buck's voice barking over the intercom system.

"Lance, can you hear me?"

"Yes, coming through loud and clear."

"Lance...what do you think we'll find in Sarrayota?" Buck queried.

"I honestly don't know," Lance replied. "I can only hope there'll be some clues to point us in the right direction. Birds have never been known to attack man as wantonly as reported. Something is—" He stopped short.

"What? What's wrong?" Buck said.

"It's just occurred to me...but, we haven't seen one bird since we left Star Field. Not one."

"You're right," Buck started. "I hadn't noticed, but you're right. What can that mean?"

"I don't know, Buck. But I don't like it."

Lance geared his controls forward, pushing the Skybolt as hard

as he could. He wanted to get there as quickly as possible. The situation there was gnawing at him. Something was telling him that the attack in Sarrayota was merely a precursor, that something much more serious was looming on the horizon. And it was that thought that chilled him to the bone.

* * * * *

Sarrayota emerged in the distance, as the warm summer sun began its slow but steady descent into sunset. The brilliant, orange display bathed the sleepy seaside town in a hue that was truly breathtaking. It was hard to believe that a town like this was the scene of such horror a mere twenty-four hours earlier.

“Can you see any landing area?” Buck spat out over the plane’s intercom system.

“There,” Lance responded, pointing to a small airfield to his right. He banked the plane in that direction, and quickly guided the Skybolt down to a steady and assured landing.

“How happy do you think the authorities will be to see us?” Buck asked, as Lance lifted the Skybolt’s canopy. “You know local sheriffs often don’t like outside help treading on their toes.”

“I’m sure we’ll get by just fine,” Lance said, hopping onto the patchy grass and soil of the airfield, little more than a flattened area of dusty farmland.

They trudged over to the minuscule hangar at the far end of the runway, and were met by a grizzled old man, obviously the man in charge there. “You wanna park yer airplane here? It’ll cost you.”

“No problem. Handle this will you,” he indicated to Buck.

Lance walked over to the end of the property, which overlooked the town itself, which in turn was situated down the rise some, hugging the ocean at the center of the bay there. The sight of the village again impressed upon Lance the image of a sleepy, peaceful habitat. What he would find there he knew not, but he intended to not tarry any longer.

“What is it, Lance?” Buck asked, having now joined the flying ace’s side.

“Let’s get down there,” he replied.

The walk down the hill was a relatively easy one. They decided to avoid the snaking dirt road and cut across a series of emerald pastures, before reaching the base of the ridge and the edge of town. The sun had now set, and as they walked down what appeared to be Sarrayota’s main thoroughfare—if one could call it that—the meager building’s began casting strange, ominous shadows down the town’s narrow streets.

“We need to find the sheriff’s office,” Lance directed. “I’d like to know more before we get into it in full tomorrow morning.”

After asking directions from a local, they soon arrived at the sheriff’s office and marched up the few steps leading inside the small, timbered building.

“Sorry, we’re about to close,” a small, uniformed man with rounded glasses said without looking up from his desk. “Unless it’s an emergency, come back tomorrow.”

“I’m afraid this can’t wait,” Lance said, his strong, deep voice rousing the sheriff from his work.

“Oh my gosh,” the sheriff said in amazement. “Are you him? Are you really him?”

Buck took a forward step and smiled. Lance knew his friend was always proud of the recognition he received wherever he went.

“Yes, it’s us...Lance Star and his incredible assistant, Buck Tellonger,” Buck said, beaming.

The sheriff rounded his desk, ignoring Buck. A grin of gigantic proportions never left his narrow face. “I didn’t recognize you at first with that beard, but I’d know you anywhere. I’ve been your biggest fan for years,” the sheriff blurted. “How you stopped that Angel of Death, I’ll never know. Wait until I tell my son about who came into my office tonight.”

Lance smiled, blushed slightly. Fame was never something he’d yearned for, but it came with the territory, and he accepted that. Nevertheless, it was something he had never become completely comfortable with.

“Thank you, Sheriff...”

“Majors,” the sheriff replied.

“Sheriff Majors, we’re here to look into yesterday’s bird attack,” Lance revealed, his demeanor becoming much more serious.

“Oh...” the sheriff said, his attitude suddenly changing. The little man shifted uncomfortably in the gaze of the two flying aces. “Why would that interest you?”

“I would think it would interest anyone who puts the public interest ahead of their own,” Buck said pointedly.

“Let’s just say,” Lance added, “that I could do with the distraction right now. And I sense a great danger here.”

The sheriff scratched his head, his fingers moving rhythmically through his thin, graying hair, his face clouding over with concern. “Look, don’t get me wrong...I’m appreciative of any help and advice you can provide, it’s just that...everyone I’ve talked to about this from the outside world thinks I’m crazy.”

“Is that why I saw no authorities in the town? No signs of any outside assistance?” Lance probed.

“But, we heard the reports on the radio, there was no mention of it being a joke or a hoax,” Buck said.

“Oh, the reports of the bird attack are being taken at face value, and that much of the story has been accepted as the God’s truth. Enough people saw what happened to assure everyone of that fact,” Sheriff Majors explained. “And we lost two of our own...” The sheriff appeared to drift into sadness before pulling himself together. “But there was more to yesterday’s attack. Much more.”

“I don’t understand,” Lance said, confused.

The sheriff swallowed hard before continuing. “We weren’t just attacked by birds yesterday...I also saw a bird as big as a man, in the sky, controlling the other birds. A Bird Man.”