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HUGO GERNSBACK, Editor

25 Science-fiction **PLUS**

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preview of the future

Complete Short Novel

NIGHTMARE PLANET

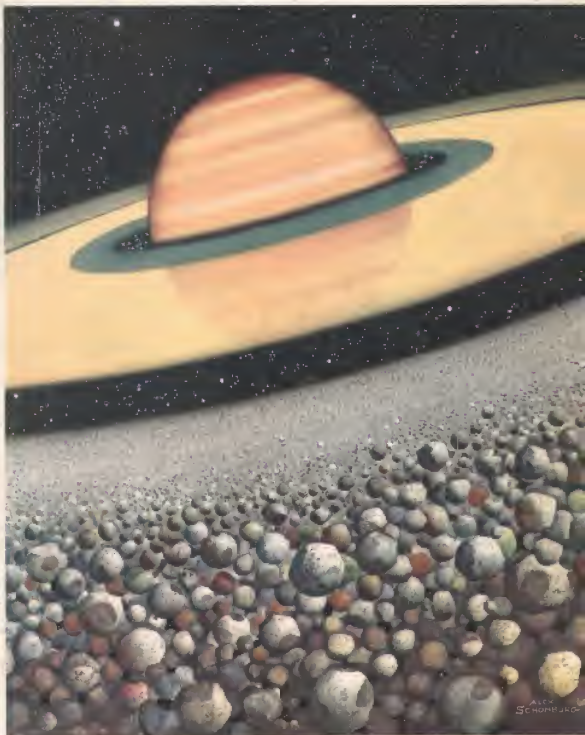
By Murray Leinster

SPECIAL:

French Novel

THE STOLEN MINUTE

By Pierre Devaux
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Saturn—Queen of the Sky

WORLD OF 2046

THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS OF ATOMICS

THE DIMENSIONAL TERROR

by HARRY WALTON

(Illustration by Paul Cooper)

HAD THE LETTER been sent to Einstein, or the Research Division of General Electric, or even the Atomic Energy Commission, it probably would have landed in the wastebasket. But magazine editors must treat readers' correspondence with respect—and even with care when, as in this case, the letter warns that a package follows.

Horace Prell read it twice, sighed a little, and turned to toss it into the "Form Reply" basket. He held his hand.

"Have we received a package from an Emmanuel Smith?" he asked his secretary.

Miss Dobbs made a small flurry through the day's mail.

"Nothing yet," she reported.

Prell slipped the letter into the "Hold" file. Experience had taught him that the package would eventually arrive, quite possibly bearing neither name nor return address. Moreover, the writer of this letter was precisely the kind to clamor lustily if the package—whatever its nature—went astray. In a crabbed, precise hand he had written:

Mr. Horace Prell, Editor
Scientific News Monthly
New York City
Dear Sir:

Encountering a description of the Klein bottle, which demonstrates certain aspects of topology, I made several for my own amusement. Like any thin glass vessel, they ring with a faint musical note when struck. I have discovered that when two bottles have the same fundamental note, a small object placed between them blurs and seems to disappear when the bottles are sounded. As the notes die away, the object reappears.

I am sending you these bottles, so that you may make the experiment yourself. Can there be a form of sound, or a harmonic extending into a fantastic fourth dimension, that nullifies light? What is your opinion?

Emmanuel Smith
Chicago, Ill.

There was no street address either on the letter or on the plain envelope.

"Crank," muttered Prell to himself, as one who had dealt with many of the breed and knew them well. For example, there was the well-dressed man who claimed to foretell the future by reading newspapers through a hole in a spoon...

Prell forgot the letter while blue-penciling copy about a gas-turbine locomotive. Then a reader's contribution, dealing with an electrical mouse that could find its way out of a maze, occupied him until five o'clock. An hour later, he reached his home.

"There's a package for you, Horace," said his wife Cora from the kitchen.

Roughly the size of a shoe box, it bore the name of Emmanuel Smith. But again no return address. Prell's home address, however, was correct. Since it

appeared nowhere in Scientific News Monthly, he wondered how Smith knew it. He also wondered why he sent the package here instead of to the office. Prell unwrapped it hastily, for curiosity is an occupational hazard among editors.

Crackpot or not, Emmanuel Smith had wrapped the contents well. There was a cardboard jacket inside the box, and within this, swathed in cotton wool, lay two grotesque little vessels of green glass. They were about five inches long. Their fanciful form was almost beautiful.

"Supper's on, Horace. Don't let the soup get cold."

Hastily he replaced the top layer of cotton wool. Cora was already seated at the table. As usual, they started the meal in silence. Prell wasn't as hungry as he had thought. He confessed to himself that the bottles intrigued him, if only because they were a geometric *tour de force*.

"Horace," Cora broke the silence as she brought out the meat loaf. "The last few nights I have been having the weirdest dreams. I haven't dreamed since I was a little girl. I don't know why I start now."

"It is strange," he answered. "What kinds of dreams?"

"I seem to be in a different world or universe. Everything is queer there. The air is thick. Objects are lighter than they should be. In fact, objects are made of space. It's all like a photographic negative. A world in reverse. Things are empty holes in solid space. The holes spin like whirlpools. Only, how can a hole spin?"

"Mathematically, I suppose it could," he considered. "But you surely didn't dream that! You must have read it somewhere. It sounds like a pretty sophisticated scientific idea."

"Maybe I did read it," she admitted dubiously. "I don't remember. It seemed very real. I even dream that I am wide awake, conscious. I dream that someone... some... thing makes me dream and tells me about this other strange world. A dream within a dream!"

"You'd better see Dr. Mendoza," said Prell. "He'll give you a sedative, or tonic, to help you sleep."

She stared at her food. "It's not really necessary. The dreams are really fascinating. They're almost like a story. The strange being in the dream explains that there is telepathy between us when I sleep. The subconscious takes over in sleep, doesn't it? He—the being—is very curious about us. He observes us and our world through my mind. Silly, isn't it?"

Watching her as she pecked at her plate, he wondered if she wished it were not silly. Perhaps she realized his suspicion, for her next words were mundane enough.

"Madge is having another baby. This will be their third."

Prell nodded noncommittally. He knew his wife blamed him for their childlessness, and he wasn't altogether certain she was wrong. He ate mechanically, in silence.

"You might say something," Cora remarked, finally.

"What do you want me to do, congratulate you?" he asked irritably.

Immediately he was sorry, but the damage was done. All too frequently he said the worst possible things to Cora, who was difficult about receiving apologies.

She stiffened for an instant. Then she looked down contemptuously, like a civilized woman in a slaughterhouse.

"I'm sorry, Cora. You know I didn't mean—"

"There is nothing to say, Horace. I try to be pleasant, but you turn our every-day life into a nightmare. Why did I ever marry you!"

It was a miserable meal, right through the coffee. Afterward, without a further word, she went to her room, while he retired to his den.

THIS WAS a shelf-lined retreat with one comfortable chair and a good reading light. Since Cora never touched the den, a pile of books lay on the lamp table. He picked up the top one, George Gamow's *One Two Three . . . Infinity*.

On page 62, a Klein bottle. A three-dimensional vessel with only one side, which returns on itself to form both inside and outside. A geometric freak, hinting by analogy of yet stranger things in other dimensions, other worlds.

Cora, with her hair in curls, and wearing a faded chenille robe, called from the hallway. "There is another package by the back door. It was in my way all day, and I wish you wouldn't send office things to the house."

He mumbled thanks as he climbed the stairs to bed. As he sat idly and meditated, something made him pick at the cotton wool in the shoe box. His fingers trembled a little.

Besides the bottles, there were two tiny wooden mallets and a pair of wire stands. A loop of narrow ribbon encircled the serpentine return neck of each bottle. By this loop it evidently was supposed to hang from one of the standards. He set up the standards and suspended the bottles. He struck one with a mallet.

The tone was disappointing, a mere *plink* of sound. The second bottle sounded exactly the same. He struck both bottles at once.

Though only a little louder, the combined tone acquired an entirely new quality—something beyond

depth and timber. Its vibration instantly intrigued Prell. Was there a strange acoustical effect here, quite apart from Smith's absurd notion that it nullified light? A new sense beyond that of the ear?

Curiosity had made sound, at one time, a brief obsession of Prell's. He had spent many hours with a tape recorder, a high-fidelity electronic amplifier, and even a small audio oscilloscope. Deliberately he replaced bottles and mallets in the box and went downstairs into the cellar.

Here was his workbench with a Bunsen burner, some flasks containing the flaking remains of forgotten solutions (for he was not a tidy man), and miscellaneous old dry cells and small hand tools. He cleared enough room for the bottles and their standards. From under the bench he drew the oscilloscope.

The pulse in his ear always beat audibly when he grew excited. It was pounding away now. He was always skeptical of claims and unproved facts when he poised a blue pencil over a manuscript, but at this moment he was uncritically eager, like a small boy with a new chemistry set. He switched on the oscilloscope and impatiently waited. It warmed slowly.

At the *plink* of a single bottle a slender quivering line blossomed on the tube face. Prell could have calculated its frequency, but he was too excited. His pulse thumped as he poised the two hammers. He struck. The crest of the wave forked. The vibrations were out of phase. Studiously co-ordinating his muscles, he smote the bottles again.

The crests on the tube face leaped momentarily. And, as again his ears plumbed the hidden depths of the combined tones, the oscilloscope line flattened!

Soon the note died; he struck a single bottle again. The green line leaped in response. Again to both bottles, struck simultaneously, it reacted only for a split second. There was, then, something strange about the

In the earlier days of science-fiction, the concept of a physical fourth-dimensional world was a standard gambit of the genre. With the more general acceptance in recent years, of Albert Einstein's presentation of time as the actual fourth dimension, this phase of science-fiction is now seldom seen. Yet we know that there are sounds transmitted at frequencies which the human ear cannot detect; that energy impulses travel all about us, unseen by human eyes. Why is it necessarily impossible that there might be coexisting about us either in hyper-space or in an intangible state, an entirely different world unsuspected by us? Such a concept serves as the setting for this very disquieting science-fiction story.



bottles. It was possible, he knew, to obtain from two tones a beat frequency unlike either of them. But why did the oscilloscope not show it? There was no doubt that he heard it. If it had not been for the unlucky flare-up at supper, he would ask Cora to confirm what he heard with his own ears, but he knew she would refuse to be helpful. Besides, he certainly *did* hear it.

Possibly the microphone was defective in the range of that particular tone. There must be a simple explanation. He shouldn't make too much of the phenomenon, but what was Emmanuel Smith's strange delusion? Were these effects tricks of the senses?

He pushed a small can of glue between the bottles. Then he carefully struck them together. The oscilloscope trace leaped and flattened. The *plink* of glass drew itself out into that incredibly distant tone.

And from the bottom of the label upward, *the can disappeared!*

The pulse in Prell's ear seemed to stop altogether for a moment. Then it throbbed on firmly, exultantly. And as the note died, the can came blurrily into view.

Recognizing that moment as the most important one in his life, Horace Prell stood perfectly still for a minute, mallets in hand, trembling slightly.

Then he struck the bottles again. The can obligingly disappeared, a little longer this time.

Prell laid the mallets down. He felt suddenly weak, and sank down on a box to think.

Then he remembered the box at the back door. Instantly he rushed upstairs and found it. It had not come by parcel post or express, and he briefly wondered whether Emmanuel Smith (whose name appeared in one corner) had delivered it by hand. Prell picked it up—it was quite heavy—and hastened with it to the cellar.

He tore off the lid savagely. There was an envelope inside. Resisting the impulse to unpack the box first, he read the letter.

Dear Prell:

By now you know that I am not wasting your time.

The effect you have now witnessed impelled me to make two much larger Klein bottles, of bronze, tuned to the same note as the small ones, but several octaves lower. Imagine my disappointment when they failed to show the same effect!

Later I learned otherwise. What the smaller bottles merely concealed, these reveal. Set them up four feet apart. Stand between them, facing precisely 90 degrees to the line that joins them. Use the mallets enclosed to strike both at once, as hard as possible.

What you will see, I leave you to interpret for yourself. A word of warning: the tone of these fatigues the ear strangely. Do not risk the experiment by striking the bottles idly.

Emmanuel Smith

IT MAY HAVE BEEN Prell's cry that awakened Cora, or it may have been the dream. Wide awake instantly, she felt for his familiar bulk beside her.

He was not there, and, with the dream vivid in her mind, she switched on the lamp and fumbled into her mules. Pulling her robe over her shoulders, she headed for the cellar stairs. Light glowed from below, but all she could see from the top of the flight was the pile of cordwood stored at the bottom.

"Horace, are you still down there?"

"Yes. Yes, of course," answered Prell. "But what are you doing up so late?"

"I've been dreaming again—about you."

To this there was no answer, but, in the way of those who have a dream to tell, Cora took silence for permission to tell it.

"It was one of those dreams that other-*being* seems to make me have. But tonight I knew why. He was a scientist in his own world, and after learning what things look like here, and how we behave (all through telepathy, you see), he learned how to send things into our space. Real things made of our kind of matter by inverting some of their solid space. You hear me, Horace?"

He answered slowly. "You might talk louder."

"Well, what he really wanted was a sample of our kind of matter. You see, he could—he could generate a transmitter here, but somebody would have to work it. So he found out what you were interested in, and created some letters I must have told him how to write—I suppose I remembered from that month you were sick and I helped you with correspondence at home. Then he sent the transmitter, but it was a very simple one. It could only work on wavelengths like those doctors read in the brain—and so it could transmit only living tissue. He was sorry, because he had nothing against you, but he had to make you send yourself. You'd never suspect, because the transmitter was nothing but two bottles—"

"Two bottles?" asked Prell in a wire-taut voice.

"Yes. Queer little glass bottles—no, I guess they were bronze. And they sent you out of our space, into an in-between space where he could reach you. My goodness," said Cora in her normal voice. "Here I am, bothering you with nonsense. I'm going back to bed. You'd better come too."

"Cora, wait!" The voice from below was suddenly urgent. "I did make a queer experiment, and I seem to be in trouble. Get a flashlight and come down here."

A shiver struck through the chenille robe.

"A flashlight?" whispered Cora. "With all the lights on down there?"

She went down as she was, dreading every step, thinking that, anyway, the only flashlight they possessed was outside in the car.

"Thank heaven you've come, Cora," said Prell. "It was pitch black up to now, but I can see the flashlight at last."

Her throat seemed clamped in a vise. She looked at her hands, as if her eyes could put into them the flashlight that was not there.

"Hurry, Cora. You're still so far off; I seem to be seeing you through the wrong end of a telescope."

His voice, though audible, seemed to be incredibly remote!

Cora forced herself down the last step. Turning, she could see the whole cellar from end to end, mercilessly illumined by two bare bulbs. The windows were closed, the hatchway door bolted.

Two bronze bottles, gray-brown, horribly familiar, hung from the ceiling joists four feet apart. Her blood seemed to cease flowing as iciness engulfed her.

"Thank heaven you got here," said Prell. "The blackness was getting on my nerves. . . . Cora, what are you wearing? You look so strange—"

His voice knifed thinly through from nothingness.

"But you're not Cora!" shouted Horace Prell. "You aren't human—what are you? Cora, can you hear me? The air is thickening—I can't move. What have you got, whatever you are? A hook—like a knife. No—"

From an infinite distance and universes away, he cried out in terror.

The two bronze bottles gleamed dully in the prosaic glare of the naked bulbs. Light winked up at Cora from something beneath them—Prell's wrist watch.

Cora screamed. But by then she knew there was no one to hear.