



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT ALIENS
PORTRAYING HIS "SERIALS"

AMAZING STORIES

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In Our Next Issue:

PIRACY PREFERRED, by John W. Campbell, Jr. In this story, as in his previous ones, our young author offers us a rare combination of accurate science with excellently written fiction—which makes a perfect **AMAZING STORY**. This time, Mr. Campbell looks into the future of aviation—a subject which at the present time compels a universal interest.

THE NON-GRAVITATIONAL VORTEX, by A. Hyatt Verrill. When we discover what gravitation is, scientists will perhaps find it less impossible to annihilate gravity. This is an extraordinary tale, dealing with vortices that develop a strange phenomenon—the local annihilation of gravitation.

ELEMENT No. 87, by Ralph Linn. Chemists have determined from various considerations that there can be only 92 original elements in the chemical scale. Only comparatively recently have a goodly number of these been discovered. But there still remain a few about which chemists know little or nothing, and there is no telling what possibilities an undiscovered element might hold. Our author uses this idea in an exceedingly clever bit of scientific fiction.

THE UNIVERSE WRECKERS, by Edmond Hamilton. (A Serial in 3 parts) Part II. In this instalment our four travelers experience many dangers with the extraordinary beings of Neptune, which is nearly 3 thousand million miles from the sun, but they learn the source of the power that has caused the increased rotation of the sun, which threatens the life of all the nearer planets in the solar system.

FLAMINGO, by Clarence Edward Heller. Much has been said in the daily journals of wonderful robots, the direct successors of the almost historical "steam man" of two generations ago. But think what would happen if not only the servant and the manual worker were replaced by robots—if even our great singers and famous actors were likewise replaced in such manner. Our new author has woven a charming extravaganza of the amusements of the future—not so very far in the future, at that.

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Our Cover

This month illustrates a scene from Part I of the story entitled, "The Universe Wreckers," by Edmond Hamilton, in which the four travelers, fitted out in their space-walker suits, are making the necessary repairs to their space-flier, which sustained some damages while going through the asteroid zone on their way to Neptune.

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A Circe

One would have been sufficiently aware of this fact had one visited Gilcrest's laboratories before the disaster, and observed the army of freaks, monstrosities and living contradictions that they contained.

OUT of all the millions of sufferers during the Reign of Confusion of 1964-65, there were not more than a few hundred who understood the original cause of the disturbance.

To most of us, baffled and bewildered, the trouble seemed to descend like a veritable curse from heaven; and in our dismay and terror, it was as if the very underpinnings of the universe had given way, and all known and tested laws had been suspended. Therefore it was but natural that a wave of superstition should sweep the land; but natural that men, finding all accepted beliefs failing them, should fall back upon the emotions of savages, or of panic-stricken wild things. For who, five years ago, could have foretold that lambs were to become like lions, and lions like lambs, and

supposedly harmless creatures to prove themselves our mortal foes?

Now, however, when the menace has passed and the world has regained its sanity, we can begin to look with perspective upon the events of 1964-65, and take proper account of causes and effects. And we can perceive that the Reign of Confusion was but a by-product of our own scientific ingenuity.

Or, more specifically, it was a by-product of the ingenuity of one man. That man, Theodore Gilcrest by name, was director of the zoological gardens recently established at Washington under governmental auspices. Had he confined himself to his duties as director, there would have been no reason to pen these words, and the world would have been spared incalculable suffering; but, as we have come to learn, he had a penchant for scientific experimentation, and his position at the head of the zoological gardens offered him an opportunity to indulge his lifelong hobby. It was not generally known at the time that he was conducting researches at the expense of his four-footed and winged charges; and, had this fact been revealed, his dismissal would probably have followed. But for several years, in a private laboratory adjoining the zoological grounds, he was wont to experiment upon an occasional wolf cub, or antelope, or serpent, as well as upon plants of various kinds and upon large numbers of cats, dogs, and insects. It must be said for him, however, that while his use of government property was unlicensed, the purpose that actuated

By Stanton A. Coblentz

Author of: "The Gas W'ced," "The Wand of Creation," etc.

Man's familiarity with animals begins with his earliest days, and the nature of his four-footed friends and enemies and of the various footed creatures of the insect world is deeply assimilated and becomes a part of his nature. But suppose that by some ray process which might be discovered sometime in the future, new and unexpected forms should be developed—if, for instance, the harmless sheep became ferocious animals, or the worm should fight the hen! Strange things have been done in the laboratory before. Why should the scientist by direct laboratory processes not do even more than has ever been achieved by the slower natural processes employed by the breeder of prize animals? The ductless glands are responsible for so much in the life processes—what might they do if it were possible to control their action?

of Science

Illustrated by
MOREY

him was never mere idle curiosity; nor was he in any way able to foresee the tragedy that lay ahead. For he was a scientist, conducting his investigations in the manner of thousands of his kindred, although with more brilliance and ingenuity than the majority; and he was pursuing the scent of what promised to be a world-moving discovery. He had ferreted out, in a word, the secret of a biological alchemy; he had solved the problem of the artificial mutation of species. And he could produce at will new varieties, even new genera and families of animals and plants!

Unfortunately, it is impossible, at this late date, to describe precisely how Gilcrest achieved his extraordinary result; for the inventor, horrified at the eventual outcome of his discovery, has destroyed the formula and so precluded for all time the repetition of his experiment. But this much is known: he operated by means of a new light-regulating machine, akin to the X-ray, although different from it in several essentials; and he availed himself of those parts of the spectrum invisible to the human vision. Opinion is divided as to whether he made use of the ultra-violet or of the infra-red rays, and he himself has resolutely refused to break silence on the subject; but what he does acknowledge, since this admission can furnish no vital clue, is that he applied the rays for definitely regulated periods to the reproductive organs and germinal cells of animals, and to the seeds, spores and pollen of plants, thereby producing a chemical change that operated in some obscure way to transform species. Gilcrest himself was never able to foresee just what direction that change was to take, and could only surmise that he had modified the life-bearing cells in some essential, creating in a few minutes the effect

of hundreds or even thousands of generations of evolution. But while the alterations appeared to follow no regular law, they were governed in one respect by a rude uniformity: they worked by a rule of opposites, and in most cases the transformed species assumed qualities as unlike their former selves as fire is unlike frost.

One would have been sufficiently aware of this fact had one visited Gilcrest's laboratories before the disaster, and observed the army of freaks, monstrosities and living contradictions that they contained. But nearly all those freaks and monstrosities have since made themselves only too familiar to the world—so that it would be pointless to describe them at this place. It will be necessary to remark, however, that Gilcrest wished his new species to prove of genuine value to mankind, and that he had found encouragement in the fact that they would breed true to type, thereby giving hope of their indefinite perpetuation. . . . And the great biologist's expectations might indeed have found justification, had it not been for the catastrophe that frustrated his years of effort in one hour and flung open a Pandora's box upon the world.

Gilcrest has never been able satisfactorily to explain the fire that attacked his laboratory late one night—whether it was due to lightning, or to incendiaries, or to an electrical short-circuit; or whether one of the transformed monkeys, finding a box of matches carelessly left on a laboratory table, had let havoc loose upon himself and his fellows. Gilcrest himself is inclined to favor the latter explanation; but, whether or not he be correct in this, the fact is that he was awakened one night with a sooty odor in his nostrils and with the red flare of fire before his eyes. And, to his consternation, he discovered

that his laboratory, which lay just behind his house, was a scene of spouting smoke and flame. Not more than half awake, he gave the alarm and aroused the household; then, long before the arrival of the firemen, dashed to the laboratory door, and fighting his way through the strangling fumes, flung open cage after cage, setting free the screeching, screaming occupants. Behind him he heard the flapping of panic-stricken wings, the rushing of panic-stricken legs, as the released birds and beasts made for the doorway and vanished. Yet never for one moment, in his excitement and alarm, did he reflect as to the folly of letting these creatures loose upon the world; maddened at the thought of their peril, he worked in reckless disregard of his own safety, until, assisted by neighbors and firemen, he had rescued most of the animals, as well as a considerable number of the plants that grew about the windows in flower-pots. And when at last, scorched and half suffocated, he extricated himself from the ruins, it was in a state of torment and nervous collapse that was to confine him to his bed for a month. . . . None the less, between delirious ravings and mutterings, he was heard to rejoice that his creations had been spared. Little did he suspect what a plague he had bequeathed to mankind!

A day or two later, the earliest signs of trouble began to be reported. A Maryland farmer, waving a stick at a creature that he mistook for a crow, was terror-stricken to find the bird attacking him and lacerating him about the hands and face. Simultaneously, a farmer in Delaware, about to shoot a chicken hawk, was dumfounded to hear the supposed marauder bursting into song, which he declared to compare favorably with that of the field lark. Of course, neither report was believed at first—yet both were mild enough by comparison with that which lay in store. It was in the city of Washington that the first pronounced symptoms were observed; and the manner of their appearance was such that denial was impossible. Not one citizen, but a thousand, paused in astonishment to watch the little dog equipped with claws that enabled it to climb trees like a squirrel; and another thousand, at the lowest estimate, listened to the squirrel with a transformed larynx that permitted it to bark like a dog.

These, however, were the least of the new-born wonders. Others were more alarming by far. In certain sections of the city, a panic was caused by the announcement that several cats, reverting to ancestral habits, had become beasts of prey, at war with all human society; and no one could explain why it was that a score of lonely pedestrians, mostly women and children, had been pounced upon at night and dangerously slashed by the blood-thirsty brutes. Still more difficult to account for was the fact that rabbit-like creatures had been seen—surely, not actually rabbits!—which had forgotten the traditional timidity of their kind, and had no hesitation about approaching and biting unwary passers-by. But most horrible of all was the discovery that venomous serpents were wriggling about among the lawns of the Capitol grounds—serpents of an extraordinary kind, with monstrously overdeveloped heads and poison-sacs, combined with a swiftness of motion and a sagacity that made them almost impossible to slay. Only after one of these reptiles had had the poor judgment to sink its fangs into the calf of a United States Senator, and had made the Mistress of the White House execute a screaming retreat, did men in general recognize the seriousness of the situation.

But much more frightening manifestations soon began to appear. One of the most disquieting of all was the insect menace. Shall any of us ever forget the terror of the summer of 1964, when a new species of house-fly descended upon us, equipped with a blood-sucking paraphernalia that the mosquito might have envied? Shall we forget how our days were passed in torment, and how we could scarcely venture out of doors without being attacked by swarms of these little savages, whose ferocity was equalled only by their fecundity, and who left one's skin a mass of aching bites and blisters? Probably due to the transportation of their eggs in railway coaches and motor cars and in the garments of travelers, they quickly spread across the country; and, before the summer was over, there were few cities and scarcely a countryside in the United States in which one could safely venture abroad without covering one's face and hands with mosquito netting.

But worse still—though for a while it seemed impossible to believe that anything could be worse—was the new species of wood-burrowing beetles, whose jaws had the efficiency and the cutting power of steel blades. It is hard to say how many buildings they undermined, excavating in the walls and foundations and living on an exclusive diet of wood. It is only known that thousands of dwellings, apparently substantial a few months before, suddenly were in a state of collapse, their floors and walls giving way, their posts and pillars weak as cardboard. And invariably thousands of little gray-green beetles, scarcely a quarter of an inch in length, would be found complacently dining among the ruins.

But for the average man, if he were fortunate enough not to be made homeless by the beetles or goaded to self-extinction by the flies, perhaps the most distressing thing about the entire era was the confusion that gave it its name. One could not approach an ant or a butterfly and be sure that it would not squirt poison into one's face. One could not befriend a homeless dog without suspecting that it was about to spring at one's throat. One could not observe a browsing cow without fear that it would charge like a maddened bull. One could not feed a dove without danger of being slashed as by an eagle, or watch an eagle without the possibility of hearing it cooing; one could not be certain whether the creature swimming in a pond were a duck or a webbed hen, or whether the bird of brilliant plumage were a pheasant or a transformed sea-gull; and one would have to learn not to be surprised at seeing the deer giving chase to the fox, or the sparrow darting in pursuit of the falcon, or the worm turning and defying the early robin. Such sights, during those astounding years, 1964 and 1965, were to become the merest commonplace; and the only thing that any one knew positively was that the action of all creatures alike had become unpredictable. Had nature herself gone crazy? Had the laws of thousands of years suddenly been suspended? Not so! as we of today realize well enough; the trouble was due solely to those misfit creations of Gilcrest, all of which, whatever their particular characteristics, possessed one attribute in superlative degree: the power of reproducing rapidly and prolifically, and of endowing their descendants with their own astonishing qualities.

But the changes introduced by Gilcrest did not confine themselves to the animal world. They were botanical as well as zoological in their nature; and there were those who maintained that the worst pests of all were the new plants. One could hardly be blamed for ob-

jecting, for example, to the exquisite red rose with the odor of carrion; or to the lily with the concealed sabre-like spines that would leap out unexpectedly and stab one; or to the grass with the tar-like exudation, which made whole fields resemble great patches of sticky fly-paper; or to the little vine-grown fruits which, despite their similarity to the blackberry, had an acrid, unforgettable taste comparable to that of ink. Or, again, one had a right to complain when the pollen of certain new plants contaminated the seeds of fruits and vegetables, so that cucumbers had a habit of becoming sweet like water-melons, and water-melons of being sugarless as cucumbers; while one could never be sure, upon opening an orange, whether it was not to be sour as a lime; and, upon slicing a tomato for one's salad, one would feel fortunate if it did not have the flavor of red pepper. It was as if nature, like some malicious jester, had performed feats of jugglery, until everything was topsyturvy, and one could not know when one was to fall victim to some unprecedented prank.

But what could be done to restore the world to sanity? How conquer the formidable array of animal and vegetable freaks? This was a question of crucial importance, for mankind was being more than harried and annoyed; it was being demoralized; men no longer went as usual about their daily work; they toiled, if at all, in a nerveless, half-hearted manner, and with the irritation of beings under a perpetual shadow; incalculable numbers were giving way to hysteria, and even to insanity; thousands upon thousands were roaming the land at random, without reason or purpose; crimes of passion and violence were becoming frequent as never before, and at the same time there was an aimlessness never previously observed in the ordinary affairs of life. Had the Day of Judgment been impending, men could scarcely have behaved in a more haphazard, irrational way—for the solid earth seemed to be slipping from beneath them, and in the ensuing chaos they had no firm goal at which to clutch.

Nor could the wisest among them offer much aid. Philosophy had no word of advice to utter; religion stood back dazed and speechless; even science apparently could not extend a helping hand. And yet science was doing its eager best to solve the dilemma; science had flung open ten thousand laboratories, wherein physicians and biologists, bacteriologists and chemists were laboring to combat the pest. The record of the year and a half of research has many a heroic anecdote to show, but in a practical way it accomplished nothing. During the interval, Gilcrest's plants and animals had spread to every corner of the globe, and yet not one thing had been done—absolutely not one thing—that promised to end the Reign of Confusion! In vain did the researchers experiment with poisons and deadly fumes; in vain did they attempt to wipe out the invaders by methods of direct slaughter. No task ever undertaken has appeared more hopeless; the new species were not only almost impossible to recognize at sight, but they multiplied so rapidly that in most cases two were born for every one that was killed. Such, indeed, was their rate of increase that it seemed likely that the world would soon be over-run with them! And the more pessimistic—who included two persons out of every three—began to predict that before long the earth would become uninhabitable for man.

By the summer of 1965, it seemed likely that this prediction was to be fulfilled. Throughout the length

and breadth of the civilized world, pestilence was spreading; agriculture had almost come to a standstill; commerce and industry, when they had not ceased altogether, dragged on as lamely as a dog on three legs. And since little food was being produced, and still less transported, the inhabitants of all the great cities of the earth began to cry out despairingly for bread; while half a dozen plagues, arising simultaneously, as plagues always will arise in time of want, began to take toll of the famished natives of all lands. And meanwhile there was no one to seize control of the disorganized wheels of world affairs, no one to put the farmers back upon the land, the laborers back in the abandoned factories. Only a few persevering scientists, struggling to stem the tide of disaster somewhat as a child with a toy shovel might struggle against a river floor, were still seeking a solution of the problem; and even they were not far from confessing themselves beaten.

In that terrible summer of 1965, the hospitals swarmed with the sick and dying; the streets were made dismal with the wailings of the bereaved, the moans and sighs of the hungry and the hopeless; and the churches of all lands were filled with weeping and praying penitents who foresaw the end of the world. Even the more courageous fraction of mankind, who held that our race would yet come to terms with the invaders, were assured that the world would henceforth be a harsher and more difficult place in which to live. And meanwhile none, not even the most optimistic, anticipated the sudden and complete vanquishing of the enemy.

Or, rather, none—with only one known exception. In those hysterical days, when most of us hovered precariously on the brink of unreason, few persons paid much attention to the insistent young woman who proclaimed that she had a vision foretelling the end of the Reign of Confusion. "All the new species are lacking in one essential," she contended, "and that is racial tenacity of life. The very force that brought them so suddenly into being will remove them as suddenly from our midst. They are freaks who owe their existence to the creative energy in the light rays that produced them; but that creative energy will be exhausted very soon, just as the electricity in a storage battery is exhausted; and all the plants and animals will perish."

Owing to the definite terms in which this prophecy was couched, there were those who suspected that it did not represent a vision at all, but rather a shrewd bit of scientific foresight. At all events, the young woman's prognostication was to be tellingly verified. Early in the autumn of 1965, when the world had sunk to its lowest depth of despondency and want, and when pestilence was ferreting out the quarters of rich and poor alike, an extraordinary fact was announced. The stinging flies were growing less abundant, and in some districts had entirely ceased to be seen! And the burrowing beetles were not half so noticeable as before! At first, upon hearing these tidings, men merely opened their eyes in surprise, and then, with hopeless nods, turned away—such false reports had reached them too often! But it was not many weeks before a gleam of hope began to appear in even the most hopeless eyes. It seemed incredible, but it was undeniably true!—one no longer saw dogs climbing trees; sparrows did not growl or ravens sing, canaries no longer displayed the inclinations of hawks! But thousands upon thousands of creatures, which, upon investigation, proved to be of the new

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A Circe of Science

By Stanton A. Coblentz

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species, were found lying dead in every street and field.

Evidently the creative energy breathed into them by Gilcrest had indeed been exhausted! Evidently they had completed their racial term of life! And they were to pass out like a fire which expires all the more quickly for having been vivid and vehement.

Such, in fact, proved to be the case. A few lingering specimens of Gilcrest's creations survived throughout the winter, and even into the spring of 1966; and then the world, waiting fearfully, incredulously, half expect-

ing the peril to be renewed, found that it was greeted only by the ordinary plants and animals. And once more the wheels of factories began to rumble, and the edge of farm implements to seek the soil. The Reign of Confusion was over; and mankind, racked with suffering and less numerous by several millions, turned toward a future in which scientific experimentation was to be conducted much more cautiously than it ever had been carried out in the past. Man had learned his lesson from sad experience.

THE END