



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS  
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

# AMAZING STORIES

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## In Our Next Issue:

**THE UNIVERSE WRECKERS**, by Edmond Hamilton. (A serial in 3 parts) Part I. We are inclined to take everything for granted—particularly the courses of Nature. There is, after all, no absolute assurance that the sun, for instance, should continue indefinitely to turn at its present speed. What would be the final result of the centrifugal force if the sun started to turn more and more rapidly? What would happen to the planets which rotate around this great luminary? Mr. Hamilton needs no introduction, but we do want to say that this surpasses the best interplanetary story by him that we have yet published. Read the first instalment in the May issue.

**MADNESS OF THE DUST**, by R. F. Starzl. Although this story was written some time ago, an extract taken from "The New York Times" of December 21, 1929, gives almost word for word a similar description of an operation performed by a ship's Captain, following radio instructions from a physician. How then, can we say anything is impossible? But this is only an incident in an unusual story, excellently told, and which contains a good bit of science.

**THE IVY WAR**, by David H. Keller, M.D. Here is a new story by Dr. Keller, based on the always interesting subject of botany, dealing with a subject that is little known as yet. The "Ivy War" goes on in the good old Keller manner, which some of our readers seemed to have missed recently. It is absorbingly interesting and plausible, without.

**SYNTHETIC**, by Charles Cloukey. By this time, Mr. Cloukey has become a familiar and well-liked author in *AMAZING STORIES*. In this story, he offers us an exceedingly clever, swift-moving aviation exploit of the future that shows good imagination and excellent knowledge of his subject. (Crowded out of the last issue.)

**THE NON-GRAVITATIONAL VORTEX**, by A. Hyatt Verrill. Here is another of Mr. Verrill's extraordinary scientific tales, based on the local annihilation of gravitation.

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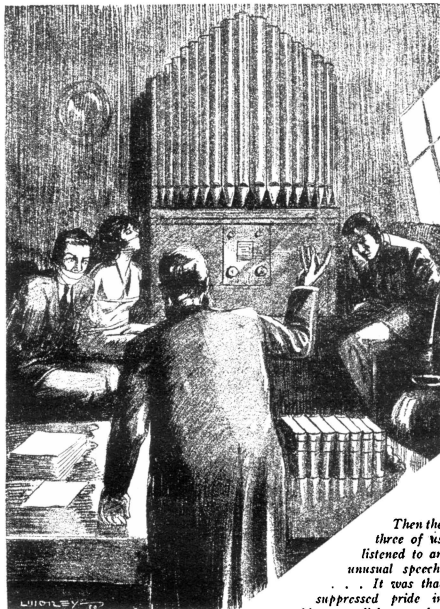
### Our Cover

this issue depicts a scene from the story entitled, "The Conquest of the Earth," by Isaac R. Nathanson, in which the representative of the strange intelligent beings from the nebula of Andromeda is pointing out to the unsuspecting earth people, on a screened easel-like stand, on which it has a picture of the nebula, just where they come from.

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*THE Chinese, ingenious in methods of torture, have a very effective method for disposing of their victims or making them "confess"—the constant slow dripping of cold water on the head of the victim. The very monotony of the slowness and rhythm of this continual drip, drip, drip, and the slow chill of the water work havoc with the victim. But a slow, everlasting monotony is not the only sure means of eliminating human life. An accelerating rhythm of certain sounds must have definite detrimental effects on the human organism—depending upon various factors, some of which are cleverly considered in this story by Mr. Cloukey.*

Illustrated by  
MOREY



*Then the three of us listened to an unusual speech. . . . It was that suppressed pride in his accomplishments that caused him to tell his plans*

# RHYTHM

By  
Charles Cloukey

*Author of—"Sub-Satellite,"  
"Paradox," etc.*

**I**T was several years ago, in 1999, to be exact, that Graham Greene and the Flaming Atom and I had our little adventure with the cold-blooded Calvroon and his rhythmic toy. It was quite a scientific affair. Because of my lifelong friendship with Graham Greene, I witnessed the entire drama from beginning to end without taking a very active part in it. Who I am doesn't matter, but I'll have to tell you something about Greene and ~~the~~ Atom or you won't understand my story.

First, Graham was the step-nephew of Elmer Calvroon. Second, he was a cripple and a scientist and a human, lovable man. The Flaming Atom loved him, loved him even more because he was a cripple. You see, he had been flying from New York up to the Maine coast to spend a week-end with her and her family, when an unexpected sleet-storm of exceptional violence had so blinded him in his little runabout sport model monoplane

that he had crashed in the New Hampshire hills. Both his feet were crushed and it was almost three days before he was found, so secluded was the place where he fell. Infection had set in, and in spite of the marvelous medical science we possess at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the left leg came off at the knee and the right at the ankle. His heart was permanently weakened. Calvroon learned of this last fact. Graham never made a secret of it.

Greene had been engaged to the Atom for more than a year before his crash. The accident made no change

in their plans. They had still almost a year to wait, for the girl's parents insisted strongly that she was not to marry until she was twenty-one.

"Flaming Atom" was my friend's scientific pet name for her who had nursed him back to health and life. It fitted her perfectly, whereas her real name, Elsie Damon, absolutely failed to do so. She lacked an inch or so of five feet, while Greene was six-feet-three with his artificial legs. She possessed a head of hair whose color closely approximated cochineal carmine, instead of the brickly orange common to most red-headed people. With her intense restless energy and her turbulent emotional temperament, she thoroughly justified the appellation.

He and she and I were listening attentively to the legal matter being discussed by Paul Jameson, family lawyer to three generations of scientific Greenes. The aged legal man was replying to a question that had been posed by Graham.

"The first of next month will be the tenth anniversary of the disappearance of your father. Unless he should reappear before that day he will be considered legally dead, according to the present laws of the state, and the fortune will go to you, together with the only key in the world to Vault Number Three of the Second National Bank, which is one of the business properties your father controlled. In the vault are the only remaining descriptions and records, the notes, apparatus and instructions which would permit a scientist to repeat one of your father's greatest discoveries, the secret of which, at the present time, is known to no other man. You are aware of that to which I refer.

"If, however, you should die before the first, the fortune and the key would then go to your father's step-brother, Elmer Calvroom, according to the terms of the will."

Graham's artificial limbs were so scientifically perfect that in one sense of the word he was not a cripple at all. He seldom used the heavy cane that he always carried with him. As the three of us walked the short distance back to the spacious, well-equipped laboratory that had been the elder Greene's, I made a remark about the rather unusual provision of the will, which gave everything to Graham, and yet said that should he die everything was to go to Calvroom. I was unable to refrain from speculating as to the motives of the man who had written that will. My remark caused my friend to break his thoughtful silence.

"Von, you know very well what is in that vault, the thing that Jameson so carefully avoided in his round-about speech. You're an older man than I am, and undoubtedly you remember the events of ten years ago much better than I do. But I remember enough. When my father produced organic beings artificially in the laboratory, when he succeeded in the horribly complex task of the synthesis of protoplasm, when he found the secret of life somewhere in the phosphorus compounds, yet remember how his great work was received. Because he insisted upon keeping his method a secret, he was branded as a fraud by the scientists of the world, in spite of his recognized ability and his unstained reputation. The others could not admit the possibility of his accomplishment without incontrovertible proof and demonstration, which he withheld. They would not take his word. And he had his reasons for withholding that secret, Von!"

Graham continued in a tone that grew more gloomy.

"And the people of the world denounced him either as a fake or an atheistic, inhuman meddler in God's affairs, than which nothing could be farther from the truth. Fanatics made one attempt after another to kill him, believing him in league with the devil to destroy the world. Dozens of attempts were made to break into the laboratory and steal his voluminous notes and formulas. He killed one thief in self-defense.

"Then he put everything in that vault and destroyed all keys to it but one, which is in another vault. Few people know what Vault Number Three contains and fewer know where its key is.

"The world was no longer safe for Thornton Greene, branded as a fake by some and as a menace to humanity by others. After the sixth fanatical attempt to kill him, in which I myself barely escaped death at the age of sixteen, he disappeared from the world. But I know he's not dead; even though he's never communicated with me, he must be alive in some part of the world, with a changed name and probably a changed face also, safe from identification, still making his marvelous discoveries in half a dozen lines of science.

"The key will soon be legally mine. Unless my father returns or sends some message to me I am going to follow a plan I have long had in mind. For eight years I have been obtaining the best possible education along the lines of biology, organic chemistry, and related sciences. Most of the world thinks my father's records have been destroyed. That is what he wanted the world to believe. I hope I have qualified myself to understand and repeat his experiments, and to carry them further in secret. If I find any way in which his discovery will be of any benefit to the world I shall publish the whole process and vindicate him in the eyes of science and humanity. If I don't, I shall destroy every vestige of the notes, every shred of evidence. I think that is what he would have me do."

The next day we encountered the rhythmic toy.

Elmer Calvroom had been planning for months to kill Greene. I do not think it was the money he desired. It was that scientific secret in the locked vault, the secret of synthetic life. Calvroom was a scientist, too, and to his warped point of view it was absolutely necessary that Graham Greene be eliminated.

But he realized that he would be suspected at once should Greene be killed. The murder laws are strict. It was necessary further that Graham Greene be eliminated in such a way as to leave no possible clues to the manner of his death. It was highly desirable that his death should appear to be natural. Calvroom decided that he could not take a chance with any of the ordinary methods of murder. If he were ever to profit by the killing of Greene, the crime must be perfectly done.

The device which the sardonic scientist called the rhythmic toy was born in his brain from the union of two entirely different memories. One was the memory of the airplane crash that had deprived the tall heir of Thornton Greene of his feet. The other was the memory of a few well-proven physiological facts. He constructed the machine. After all, it was a simple affair, operated by a small electric motor.

On the early morning of April 8, 1999, when my friend was alone in his laboratory, he received a phone call from Calvroom, who invited him to come over to his laboratory and see a new invention. So Graham walked calmly into the trap.

To you who read this story, not having been acquainted with the two men for the long years I have, this action on the part of my friend may seem incredible. You may wonder why he did not suspect anything wrong. From my intimate knowledge of the men, I believe I can answer your doubts.

In the first place, Graham was not of a suspicious nature. In the second place, the invitation was so natural and aboveboard that it did not arouse any suspicion. In the third place, Calvroom was an inventor with 780 patents to his credit, and he was rather vain about it, in his cold, reserved way. It was his regular habit, when he had completed another device, to demonstrate it to his step-nephew before taking out a patent and selling the device to some firm that could use it. Several times, in company with Graham, I had visited the combination laboratory and machine-shop of Calvroom and listened to him explain, with that curiously suppressed pride in every tone of his voice, the principles behind some new addition to his large family of ingenious mechanical inventions, the details of its construction, its uses and advantages over the previous machine it had rendered obsolete. So on this morning Graham thought merely that his step-uncle had completed some new machine and was ready to demonstrate it. He went over to the other laboratory without the faintest shadow of a suspicion that Calvroom fully intended to kill him in cold blood in order to obtain those records and notes in Vault Number Three.

I had just finished a late breakfast and was idly wondering why Thornton Greene had equipped Vault Number Three with a key instead of the usual combination lock, for it seemed to me that the latter would have served his purpose well, when the Atom called me on the 'phone and announced that Graham was not at his laboratory, but had left a note for her saying that he had gone to Calvroom's.

The Atom was immediately suspicious of Calvroom. She had never liked him. She explained that Graham had expected her to arrive about noon, and had left the note in case he hadn't returned by that time. She had arrived early and had found the note. Then, she told me, she had telephoned to Calvroom several times without any of her calls being answered. She was anxious about her fiancé, and asked me to accompany her on a visit to the laboratory of the step-uncle to investigate. I agreed, for I could easily detect the fear and suspicion in her voice. I called Calvroom myself and got no answer.

I felt uneasy at once. Calvroom had always impressed me as a man who would stop at nothing to gain his ends. Suddenly it seemed quite possible to me that he was planning to abduct and kill my friend in order to obtain the key to life. A hard and selfish man, Calvroom. He wanted the secret all for himself. I don't think it ever occurred to him to ask Graham to share it with him. If he had, Graham would in all probability have refused.

After I had rung the bell and knocked on the door for more than five minutes it opened and Calvroom himself stepped out of his laboratory. Seeing the Atom and me, he inquired in a level, balanced, cold, and rigid voice, "What do you want?"

I invented some plausible fiction on the spur of the moment.

"I want to see Graham Greene," I stated. "An important message has just arrived for him and I must deliver it at once."

"You're lying, Von der Konz. Besides," he added almost hastily, "Graham Greene is not here." He turned on his heel to reenter the lab. The Flaming Atom flared up angrily.

"You're lying. He is here."

Before he could stop her she had darted past him into the laboratory. Calvroom turned silently and followed her, trying to slam the door in my face, but I was in as soon as he was. The Atom was throwing open a heavy "icebox" door at one end of the room, a door that was obviously soundproof, as was the room to which it gave ingress. Calvroom had apparently come out of this room to answer the bell, and had left the door open a fraction of an inch.

In two seconds the cold-blooded madman at my side produced a small derringer pistol, the type that fires those murderous mushroom slugs, from a cleverly concealed sleeve holster, and shot down the Atom. She fell in a little heap in the doorway. I made an involuntary motion toward Calvroom and found the little gun with the big bore looking me in the eye. Calvroom's eyelids drooped a little as he enunciated his threat.

"If you move one inch, Von der Konz, I shall kill you." I did not move. I was not armed and I had seen enough to convince me that my captor would carry out his threat. I permitted my hands to be bound behind me with small but very strong metallic cords. Then I was efficiently gagged.

Calvroom's bullet had glanced off the Atom's temple, stunning her, but inflicting only a minor flesh wound which bled profusely. She regained consciousness just as the man with the gun finished binding and gagging her.

Then Calvroom took us both into the soundproof room. Graham Greene was there, gagged and tied to a chair. His face was a study in despair when he caught sight of the girl with the red blood slowly dripping from her temple. He made one mighty but ineffectual effort to free himself. Calvroom used the gun to persuade me to submit to being bound to another chair. Then he took the kicking, struggling, gagged girl from her lover's side and bound her to a third chair. Finally he stood off and regarded the three of us with an almost puzzled expression.

Then the three of us listened to an unusual speech. Calvroom calmly announced his intention of killing us all and then proceeded to explain to us just how he was going to do it, in precisely the same tone as he used when explaining some new invention. It was that suppressed pride in his accomplishments that caused him to tell us his plans. Some of what he said follows:

"When I first decided to kill you, Greene, I realized that it would be best not to use any ordinary method of inflicting death. Chemistry today is marvelously advanced. Any known poison could be detected. All deaths by violence are strictly investigated. And I realized that I would immediately be suspected because of the terms of that will. So I devised a method of killing you that will leave no possible clue to the manner of your death. When you are found in your own laboratory tomorrow or the next day no one will suspect that you didn't die of simple heart failure. If they do suspect, it will never be proved, for I am going to kill you scientifically without leaving the slightest evidence of that fact.

"I have recently been working on a number of improvements to the pipe-organ, and I had this sound-proof

room constructed because some officials of the hospital near by complained to the authorities about the various noises, musical and otherwise, that I was producing practically all of the time. This room permitted me to carry on such experiments without moving my whole laboratory, for the room is absolutely sound-proof.

"In the compartment in the wall behind that lattice-work you see at the left, which compartment extends also down into the basement, are several organ pipes which I was using a few months ago to produce very low notes for experimental purposes, some of the notes being so low that only vibrations were produced. This little switch in the wall, when I throw it, will start an electric motor which will compress sufficient air to play the pipes, though I am only going to use one note. The organ pipes together with an automatic device for gradually increasing the speed of the machine that plays them, constitute the invention I call my rhythmic toy.

"Let me explain a few facts about rhythm. Why is it that music affects a human being? Why does a snappy, rapid march make us feel energetic, patriotic? Why does a funeral march cause the average person to feel sad, melancholy, and depressed? How can we explain the effect of syncopated jazz?

"Part of the answer to these questions is in the music itself, the major or minor key, the sharps and flats, the tones of the instruments. But rhythm plays by far the greater part in it.

"*The human heart has a strong tendency to beat in time with any well-marked rhythm.* A rapid march has a strongly marked rhythm that is faster than the usual beating of the heart. The heart increases its speed to keep up with the regular boom of the big bass drum. Consequently, blood is supplied more rapidly to the brain and to the muscles. As a result the body and the mind are stimulated to increased activity by this supply of fresh blood. That's why a dance tune will set your toes twitching. Also, the increased flow of blood removes impurities from the tissues more rapidly, and the person feels more healthful and more energetic.

"The same thing is true of a funeral march. It too possesses a well-marked rhythm, but in this case it is slower than the usual beat of the heart. Involuntarily, the heart slows down to keep with it, and blood is supplied to the tissues more slowly. Therefore, the mind is sad and depressed, and the body dull and lethargic.

"The American Indians and other savages all over the world were accustomed to hold meetings about their campfires and chant their strangely rhythmic war songs to the accompaniment of the hollow note of the tom-tom, before starting out on the war-path. The individual who beat the tom-tom (although he was totally ignorant of the science involved), started at about the regular beat of the heart and slowly but steadily increased the speed until the savages, their blood surging through their arteries, had worked themselves into a frenzy of excitement and courage which they did not ordinarily possess.

"It seems that the lower the note, the greater the effect. In a band or an orchestra one does not notice the rhythm of the music of the trumpet or of the piccolo nearly as much as the rhythm of the bass instruments. The drummer sets the rhythm in a band.

"The machine that will play this organ pipe will produce short, rapid, low notes, all alike except that every fourth tone will be slightly accented. The speed will very slowly increase.

"If I started it at too great a speed, your heart could not go with it, but instead would beat with every other note, or every third or fourth note, as the case might be. So I shall start it at the average beat of the heart, about seventy five beats a minute, and it will slowly, very slowly indeed, increase in speed until five hundred or even more short separate notes are produced a minute. But that speed will hardly be necessary. Long before it reaches that extreme rate your weakened heart, Greene, will give way under the strain. You will be dead.

"Though my actual crime will be perfectly done, I am just now realizing that I have been grossly careless in the preliminary matters. I have permitted you two others to discover me with the greatest ease. I have been devoting too much thought to the technical side of the matter and not enough to the practical side. A failing of the scientific mind, I suppose—the so-called one-track mind. I should never have been so careless.

"It is obvious that your meddling must be rewarded by death. I strongly doubt that my machine will be able to work your hearts to death in the same way as it will Greene's, for yours are healthy and normal while his has been greatly weakened. You will probably be able to survive the utmost rate of speed I can obtain, but again you may not. I shall lose nothing by trying. It may save me the trouble and danger of disposing of you in any other way.

"It occurs to me now that perhaps I can put your bodies in a radio-controlled plane and crash it. Then it will seem as if Graham Greene died of heart-failure when he learned that his fiancé had eloped with his best friend. The shock of that double disloyalty will seem to have been too much for him."

Perhaps it was that incredible, inhuman pride that prompted him to brag to us of his clever way of killing us that made us hate him the most. Or perhaps it was the last part of his plan. The Flaming Atom and I were close personal friends; furthermore we were both racing pilots and had each distinguished himself by capturing a world's record now and then. Because Graham Greene was my friend and the Flaming Atom's sweetheart, our three names were often mentioned together in the newspapers. Calvroon's explanation of our presence in the crashed plane would have been very convincing to the public.

Calvroon said much more which need not be added here. We could do nothing but sit there and listen to him. Among other details we learned that he had been making the final adjustments on the machine when the Atom and I had knocked on the door. He had heard us only because he had happened to leave the door of the sound-proof room open.

Calvroon started the device and left the room, closing the heavy door. As near as I can judge, that was at three or four o'clock in the afternoon.

For three hours, three hours that seemed as three thousand eternities, I listened to the damnable, never-ceasing, steady, rhythmic, monotonous, hollow notes that ever and ever came faster, but whose speed increased so slowly. I knew that the blood was rushing through my veins, but I assure you that I was not feeling either elated or patriotic. My surplus energy was being used up by the fear that I could not conquer, by my great anxiety for my friends, and most of all by my anger and hate. Mentally I cursed his soul to hell at least three trillion times.

It was at the end of those three terrible hours that Graham's head suddenly sagged forward and he was still. A strangled scream came through the Atom's gag and great tears formed in her eyes. I looked toward my friend, limp in the bonds that held him to his chair and I swore that somehow I would revenge him. I could almost read the Atom's eyes. In them, too, I saw that determination to get revenge. It had been such a cruel death, her eyes told me. Calvroom had taken advantage of the weakness of his heart to kill him, had tortured him for three hours after telling him how he was to die. I was soul-sick to see the love and pity in her eyes. There were love and pity in mine too.

All during those three hours the blood had been trickling down from the wound in the Flaming Atom's temple. The blood had not clotted very well. For three hours she had been bleeding, and the loss of blood soon weakened her. She sagged forward too, and I was glad.

She had fainted from loss of blood and the shock she had endured. The rhythmic toy had no power over her now. She did not hear it. I could see her bosom rise and fall with her slow regular breathing. The thought came to me that perhaps her wound was to save her life, that perhaps Calvroom had defeated his own purpose to a certain extent, by shooting her. Her weary, broken heart was at rest.

But mine was not. The unending throbbing hollow note filled the room with its reverberations. Always it was the merest trifle faster. Though I knew that it was useless, I used every last ounce of nerve force and will-power I possessed in vainly trying to control the beating of my heart, trying to make it obey me and beat more slowly in spite of the rhythmic monster. I sweated blood trying to make my heart obey me. It can't be done.

Then I tried to go to sleep, to outwit the rhythm that way. Did you ever try to go to sleep in a room next to a loud and never-ceasing jazz band, and lie awake hour after hour restless and uneasy, because of its rhythm and its discords? Then perhaps you can comprehend the merest trifle of the agony I endured, waiting for a rhythmic death.

I wondered if it were within the limits of possibility that Thornton Greene would return from his hiding and arrive in time to avenge his son and save the lives of the Atom and me, to say nothing of saving his precious secret from one who had no right to it. But that was a last desperate forlorn hope. Thornton Greene did not come back from the dead.

It was late at night when Elmer Calvroom entered again the sound-proof room. He saw my face and cringed a moment from the hate he saw there.

He collected himself immediately, however, and advanced toward the figure of Graham Greene, still hanging limp in the chair. His coming awoke the Atom and another choked scream came from her, as he untied the bonds. He paid no attention to her, and finished untying the thin, strong, metallic cords that held the tall young scientist.

Then with a dramatic suddenness that affected my heart more than any devilish rhythm could ever have done, the dead man stood up rapidly, firmly, and solidly on two scientifically perfect artificial legs and swung a beautifully clean and efficient right to the jaw that lifted his arch-enemy off his feet and deposited him recumbent on the hard floor.

Graham Greene ungagged himself and snapped off the rhythmic toy.

Then he released the radiantly happy Atom and his unbelieving friend with the guttural German name from their respective bonds and tied his step-uncle thoroughly, gagging him for good measure.

"Von," he said, "will you run in the other room and call up the police? I'd like to kill this fiend, but it's against the law." I lost no time in doing as he requested.

When I returned, the Flaming Atom was standing on a chair with her arms around Graham's neck. Love laughs at trivial differences in altitude.

Half an hour later, when the Atom finally consented to release him for a minute or two, he cleared up that mystery that had been puzzling me ever since he had cleaned up Calvroom.

"Von, my friend, I'm sorry if you thought I was dead when I dropped off to sleep there. That rhythmic toy would be deadly to most people. It probably tortured you terribly. There's not a thing wrong with the principle behind it. But for one thing, it would have killed me quickly.

"It's a scientific fact, Von, that some people can hear sounds that others can't. My ears are exceptionally high-pitched. I can hear the squeak of a bat and other shrill sounds that the majority of people can not hear. Calvroom chose the lowest note he could to be quite sure our hearts would stay with the rhythm, and it was just below the range of my audibility. I could go to sleep in perfect comfort, except for that gag, in a room that seemed to me to be as silent as the tomb."

## THE END