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*A Short Weird-Scientific Story*

# The Depths of the Lens

By N. R. McFARLAND

1

*(Excerpt from the notebook of Robert Jamson)*

THE affair started when I was given a small specimen by a friend of mine, a student of geology, who had found it while searching for odd stones in a pile of river gravel. The small, globular, crystal-like rock had caught his eye, and he brought it to me, who, besides being a chemist of some note, have also delved rather deeply into geologic researches. At first glance the stone re-

sembled nothing so much as a cheap glass marble, but on closer inspection, one found that it actually *glowed*, with a pale green light. And, while its outer shape was perfectly spherical, if one contemplated it for very long one saw things rather monstrous to one brought up on as much orthodox Euclidean geometry as I was. Tetrahedrons, and other polyhedrons mingled with decagons and other polygons. One figure seemed always to merge into another and disappear, giving way to others which were dissipated in the same way. The

sides of the plane figures and the edges of the solid ones were not straight, but curving, lines that wavered like lines of smoke, and then changed position. If I concentrate deeply on some other subject, however, this fancy can be thrown off, and the globe will seem almost normal again.

I am perfectly sure, knowing what I do of this stone, that it was never created on this earth. It may have been brought from the far reaches of interstellar space by a meteor, or—ridiculous thought in one who has always pooh-poohed all such imaginative ideas—it may have been left in the river-bed by an expedition from a far world.

Be that as it may, I now use this globe as a lens for a new form of microscope I have invented, which stands before me as I write. Impelled by idle curiosity, I one day inserted it in the tube, and was surprised by the result. Perhaps because of the unusual geometrical figures within, or for some other equally peculiar reason, this lens not only magnifies greatly, but gives an examiner the effect of being *on* the glass slide, instead of above it. When I observe crystals of any sort through this lens, I seem to be beside towering and geometrically correct buildings, in orthorhombic, monoclinic, or any other of the myriad forms of crystals. A powdered chemical seen through it gives one the effect of being surrounded by immense boulders or rocks. During the course of some of these experiments, I tried a simple chemical trick, every part of the experiment being carried on under the lens. Through a medicine dropper I dropped the solution I had made up onto the slide, looking through the eyepiece at the same time. I felt that I had been transported to another world with that one look.

The ground under my feet was not earth, but a transparent composition which was hard and brilliant. I seemed to be directly in front of an

immense yellow wave which was bearing straight down on me. It swept on, and engulfed me, forcing me to struggle for my life in the oily waves. Soon I noticed, to my surprise, that the level of the liquid was going down rapidly and a thick yellow scum was swirling and twisting in places on the surface. Here was a new danger, I thought. If I were not careful I should be drawn into one of those whirlpools of scum. But even while I was trying to evade them, they ceased to be scum, and even as I watched became vast, transparent, yellow edifices which grew larger each, second, extending in all directions. I gasped in horror as the corner of a building grew straight toward me. If I did not move, this thing would crush me under millions of tons of transparent yellow stone. But I could not move a muscle, and like a coward closed my eyes to wait supinely for the end.

I can't describe the agonies I endured during the moment I waited with my eyes closed. When I opened them slowly, and looked up, I saw the familiar ceiling of my laboratory. With a laugh, I came to myself. What a fool I was! To be taken in like that through a mere microscope! Then I again bent my eye to the tube, and felt again that sensation of fear. The buildings still towered beside me, but—with what relief I realized that!—they had stopped growing. I closed my eyes again, and removed my eye from the tube. I recognized the buildings for what they were, and laughed again.

Since then I have again and again done the same experiment. I feel the greatest horror during the time I have the sensation of being on the slide, but by closing my eyes I am able to escape from it, and become myself again. Sometimes I seem barely to escape from the building in time, and have a terrible effort to close my eyes. Since that is the only way to escape, I have found out, I feel that if ever I am unable to close them, I

shall be crushed. I sometimes think that perhaps the globe brought an evil genie with it from whatever dark, far-flung star it came from, and that he is trying to imprison me until I am crushed on that glass slide. But that way lies madness. It is impossible, utterly. And yet, when I think of those moments of superb horror down there, I wonder.

Tonight I am tortured by doubts. I know my conjectures to be impossible, but nevertheless I shall try it, and make sure. I shall descend to the bottom again, and test out my thoughts. Then when the moment comes that the buildings grow toward me, I will *not* close my eyes, but I will keep them open, and show myself how absurd my fancies are.

I have a peculiar feeling, which reason also tells me is ridiculous, that I am not coming back from this trip to the slide. When I look through the microscope, it seems that I am really made smaller, and that I am projected down on the slide; though whether it is the slide or the lens I am sometimes unable to tell. I have the sensation of being on the slide, but at the same time I seem to be in the globe. Perhaps my body goes to the slide, made thousands of times smaller, of course, and my soul, in the form of a pink butterfly or something of that sort, to the lens. Well, aside with idle fancies and prepare for the test. I leave this notebook here on the laboratory table in the event that I am unable to come back from the depths of the lens. No one will believe this account, and there will be no way to prove it. If I should be crushed, my body would be so small that it

could never be seen under the great bulk of a crystal—or building.

Well, I have the solution all mixed and in the dropper. Here goes!

2

*(Clipping from the Newville Banner, August 10, 1929.)*

#### University Professor Disappears

NEWVILLE, August 10.—University officials and townspeople both are wondering about the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Robert Jamson, assistant professor of chemistry at the university here. The brilliant young doctor was last seen at ten o'clock last night, when the janitor of the building closed up for the evening. Dr. Jamson was engaged in research work at that time, and told the janitor that he would let himself out. Since then nothing has been seen of him. A possible explanation was suggested by a notebook left on his desk, but when examined, this proved to contain nothing but rather wild ramblings. One of the psychologists at the university, after examining the notebook, said that the disappearance furnished a remarkable example of the influence of fear, but further than that he would say nothing.

Another curious article on the table was a new form of microscope, believed to have been invented by Dr. Jamson, which had a peculiar globular lens, which seemed to glow with a pale green light. No explanation could be given of this, nor of the glass slide in the microscope. It was covered with orthorhombic crystals of sulfur, of the type formed in an elementary chemical experiment when sulfur is dissolved in carbon disulfid and allowed to crystallize out, which it does with great rapidity.

Police all over the state are on the lookout for Dr. Jamson, for whose disappearance university officials could give no motive. He was not known to have any love affairs, and his work was proceeding very satisfactorily. Laboratory assistants, however, said that he had grown increasingly moody during the last few days, ever since he was given a queer geologic specimen, which has been mentioned as the lens of the microscope.

