

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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the
loneliest
town

'by . . . Max Dancey

Gator's time travel experiments completely closed out a very important line of research. He closed out a few other things too.

WHEN I CAN'T stand myself any longer I go to the library. Unhappily, that's quite often.

I get a well-worn copy of what I think of as *the journal*, retire to a quiet corner, and read it again. It doesn't help much.

The volume has a reasonably unwieldy title: *The Journal of Willems Gator's Attempts at Time Travel, a Definitive Work to Prove the Impossibility of Travel into the Future.*

Then, there's the sub-title: *The 9,387 Attempts of Willems Gator to Project Himself into a Future Time, and the Failure of the Efforts Leading to the Proof Positive.*

It's a heavy book. *Weighty*, which suggests more *weighted* or *loaded*, would perhaps be a better adjective.

I turn the pages, skimming and scanning, now digging deeper, reading in certain thumb-worn spots to jog my memory, and in others to fill in my memory.

It isn't an original edition, of course. All of the original copies must have crumbled away in the more than one thousand years since the twentieth century, when the

This is one of those around-and-around stories that come out in quite the most astonishing places, putting to shame even Lewis Carroll's Father William. When you've read it once and then three or four times in sheer delight we're sure you'll ask for more, precisely as did Oliver Twist a century before the gifted Max Dancey took up his truly scintillating pen.

book was first published. However, it matters little, for the material is there. It's the words that are important, for they carried the spirit of the dream.

Our library has reading wires of the original reviews of the book. Sometimes I run through them before reading the book again, sometimes after a reading. It always helps me in my search for other, larger perspectives.

I admire those early reviewers—with one or two exceptions. Fair-minded men they were, regardless of what they thought of Willems Gator's ambition. If they didn't share the vision, at least they seemed to admire the intensity of effort with which the man tried to bring his dream to life.

Perhaps those reviewers were all staggered by the thoroughness of Gator's approach. More than one reviewer called the book a tribute to all men who had labored toward some great achievement. Here was a lad who wouldn't give up until he had proved his dream to be either realizable—or impossible.

No easy task, surely.

The text of the book was taken directly from the journals of the experiments. There was no author's comment, beyond that recorded at the time of each experiment. And, of course, the further comment that made up the title and sub-title of the book . . .

Willems Gator was eighteen when he first saw, as a young electronics major, the one path that

beckoned invitingly toward possible travel into the future.

Within a week he noted in the journal the details of the first experiment.

Arbitrarily, he had selected the date of January 1, 3000 A.D. as the time of his arrival in the future. One reviewer commented on his courage in using himself as the subject. "He had no desire," the reviewer said, "to conduct the experiments with inanimate objects, or even with rabbits. Here was a man who knew what he wanted, had faith in what he could do, and was willing to put his body where his mind was."

That, to me, summed it up.

After his first experiment, Gator was no less convinced of the soundness of his reasoning. After he threw the switch, that first time, he knew he should have found himself in the year 3,000. That he still found himself in 1975 was no reflection on his basic thinking, but only, somehow, on his equipment.

That same evening he rebuilt the equipment twice, and before the night was over the third attempt found him still in 1975.

There was an inheritance that made the experiments possible for Gator. However, after the first few months he had to drop his schooling so as to have more time and money available for the experiments.

Before the end of the first year, working full time, often eighteen

hours a day, he had concluded his two thousandth experiment.

After the first year things went more slowly. Still, the attempts averaged more than a thousand a year for quite a few years. Sometimes the equipment was completely rebuilt between efforts, sometimes there was the minor change of a pulsistor, a condenser, a resistor tube or transistor.

And, after each trial, he found himself still in the twentieth century. Wearily, he would get off the sending stage of the equipment, go to his journal, in which he had described, most exactly, what changes had been made in the equipment, and report the additional failure.

Then he would start writing notes, outlining the changes he'd make in the next trial.

The experiments slowed drastically in the final year. There were almost no changes possible in component placements, and component values, that would allow the equipment to conform to original theory, and still be different.

The original theory was still unchanged. It was the only possible theory that would permit time travel.

Experimentation was reduced to the use of various component shieldings, turning the equipment slightly so that it lined up differently with the magnetic currents of Earth, and, in some cases, to mental concentration on the year 3,000 at

the precise moment when he activated the time set.

Gator was still under thirty when he gave up. He did not consider it "giving up" in his mind. Everything had been tried and the theory had to be considered as disproved.

He never considered other theories. His reasoning led him, still, to the solid conviction that only one possibility would allow temporal-kinetics. That one path had been explored to its end. The journal was closed, arranged for publication, and Gator went to work designing electronic qualifiers for RCA. He died in 2012.

The publisher's preface of the current edition (2998 A.D.) tells of how Gator had, at least, performed a most valuable service to mankind. He had been responsible for closing out a line of research that might have wasted the energies of many other scientists. Mathematicians had confirmed Gator's original premise, and affirmed that if any time travel was possible, it would be through application of the Gator Temporal Theorem. Since Gator had proved the theory could not be made into law, for his various equipment layouts had represented all possible mathematical equations of the theory. No further work was ever deemed worth a trial. Gator's real greatness, the preface states, was in having completely closed out a possible branch of science.

Gator's notes were scientific. Yet, one can read the changing spirit

of those notes. From bright hopes to bleak despair! That's the changing tone running through those 9,375 trials.

There was no rebirth of hope.

Still, I always get a mental stimulation from going through the book, sampling here and there. When I'm ready to turn the volume in, I always leaf back again, first, to Experiment 5050, in which a change of C73 from 3.75 microfarad to 3.79 was made. There is a notation that the special value condenser, held to plus-minus one

tenth of one per cent had cost twelve dollars.

Then I turn the book into the librarian. Often, he walks to the door with me. We stand on the steps of the library and look out at the great force wall that surrounds our town.

"Think it will ever come down, Fifty-fifty?" he asks me.

I shake my head. Gatortown will be kept in quarantine, I'm afraid, until all nine thousand, three hundred and seventy-five of us are dead.

