

STARTLING STORIES

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A Complete Novel

THE BLACK GALAXY

By MURRAY LEINSTER



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The Loot of Time

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Scaly men were coming out of the strange mechanism

CHAPTER I

The Time Tractor

HUGH CAMERON rose from his knees and dusted his hands. He looked at Jack Cabot and Conrad Yancey and the two of them stared back at him, questioningly.

"We're ready to go," Cameron announced. "I've checked everything."

"You give me the willies," Yancey spoke flatly. "Checking and rechecking."

"Got to make sure," Cameron told him. "Can't take any chances, not on trip like this."

Cabot shoved up his hat and scratched his head.

"Are you sure that the theory and the mechanism are all right, Hugh?" he asked

Marooned in the Past, a Party of Travelers



A Hall of Fame Novelet

by **CLIFFORD D. SIMAK**

anxiously. "I still have a feeling we're all crazy."

Cameron nodded. "Near as I can make out, Jack, it will work. I've gone over it step by step. Pascal has something here that's unique. A theory that has no precedent—treating time as something abstract, but using that very basis for time-travel."

"It would take a guy who got kicked out of Oxford for saying Einstein's relativity the-

ory was all haywire, to make something like this," observed Yancey.

Cameron pointed to a crystal globe atop a mass of intricate machinery.

"The whole answer is in that time-brain," he said. "That's the one thing I can't figure out. How he made it I don't know. But it works. I have proof of that. The rest all checks."

"Pascal has taken the position that time is

Sends an SOS Ringing Far Into the Future!

purely subjective. That it has no existence in fact. That it is only a mental concept, but something that is entirely necessary for orientation."

"That's the part I can't get my teeth into," protested Cabot. "It seems to me that if a man were going to travel in time, there'd have to be an actual factor. Otherwise it would not obey mechanical rules. There'd be no theater for mechanical operation. In other words, just how are we going to travel through something that doesn't exist?"

CAMERON lit a cigarette and tried to explain. "Your mind sticks on the mechanical part," he said. "Pascal's theory isn't all mechanics or all mathematics, although there's plenty of both. There're a lot of psychological concepts and that's one place where they come in. He figures that even if time is non-existent, even if it has no factual identity, that the human brain has a well-developed time-sense. Time seems entirely natural to us. Viewed from the commonplace point of view, there is absolutely no mystery about it. It is firmly embedded in the human consciousness.

"Pascal figured that if you constructed a mechanical brain you could construct it in such a manner that its time-sense would be enormously magnified. Maybe ten thousand times that of a human mind. Maybe more. There's no way to tell. So Pascal not only constructed the mechanical counterpart of a human brain, but he constructed it with an exaggerated time-sense. That brain over there knows more about time right now than the human race will ever know. Nobody else on Earth could have done it. No Twentieth Century man. Pascal's a wizard. That's what he is."

"Listen, Hugh," said Cabot. "I want to be sure. I sent over to America had you come out to London because I knew that if any man could tell me anything about this pipe-dream it would be you. I want you to feel absolutely certain. I can't understand it myself. I figure you can. If you have any doubt say so now. I don't want to get stuck halfway back in time."

Cameron puffed away at his smoke. "It isn't a pipe-dream, Jack. It's the goods. The time-sense in the brain is developed to a point where it has an ability to assume mastery over time. It can move through time. What's more, it can move the time-tractor through time—with all of us inside the tractor. Not

hypnotism, because in hypnotism you only think you're some place or doing something that isn't so.

"The brain actually can move back and forth in time and it can move us back and forth in time. It develops some sort of a force. Not electricity. Pascal thought it was at first. But it isn't, though it's related to electricity. For want of a better term we might call it a time-force. That describes it well enough. It develops this force in sufficient amount to operate the control mechanism that guides the brain's movement through time."

He flipped his hands helplessly. "That's all I can tell you. The rest of it is mathematics that would be pure Greek to you and mechanics that you'd have to take eight years of college to understand." He looked at Cabot. "You'll have to take my word for it, Jack, that the blamed thing will run."

Cabot smiled. "That's good enough for me, Hugh," he said.

A shadow blotted out the sunlight on the floor.

The three looked toward the door.

Dr. Thomas Pascal stood there, a white-haired man with a face that was almost childish in its simplicity. He was one of 1940's scientific wizards.

"All ready to start?" he asked cheerfully.

Cameron nodded. "Everything seems all right, Doctor," he said. "I've checked every cable, every cog, every contact. They're all in perfect order."

"All right, then," growled Yancey. "What are we waiting for. I'm all set to slaughter me a saber-tooth."

"You'll find plenty of them," Pascal told him. "I told you I'd take you to a virgin game field. A place where a rifle shot had never been fired. That's what I'm going to do."

Cameron laughed. "Doctor," he asked, "how did you ever get the idea of selling these two mad hunters on this proposition? A hunting trip back into time. That's one for the records."

"I needed money to finish the tractor," Pascal told him, "so I cast around for someone who might be interested, but interested in such a way that my invention would not be used for base ends. Then I heard of Mr. Cabot and Mr. Yancey. Plenty of money. Famous hunters. What could be more appealing to them than a hunting trip back into the past? But they weren't easy to convince.

They listened only when I consented to let you check the entire machine."

AT THIS, Cabot shook his head stubbornly. "Doctor, you still have to show me those game fields back in the Riss-Wurm interglacial period. It's fifty-thousand years or more back there. A long ways to go."

"You'll eat mammoth steak for dinner tonight," Pascal told him.

"If you're going to make good on that promise," Cameron suggested, "we better get started. All our supplies are stored, the machinery is checked. We're ready."

"All right," agreed Pascal. "Will someone shut the door and make sure the ports are closed?"

Yancey walked to the doorway, reached out to pull the door shut and lock it. For a moment he stood still, staring out over the green hills. There, only a few miles away, lay the village of Aylesford. And beyond lay the valley of the Thames, a country steeped in legend and history. In a few minutes they would be moving back through and beyond the days which had given rise to that legend and history. Two American hunters on the maddest hunting trip the world had ever known.

Yancey closed the door, chuckling. "Wonder how much lead it takes to stop a saber-tooth?" he mused.

Turning back to the interior of the great tractor, he saw that the time-brain was glowing greenly. Dr. Pascal, standing before it, seemed like a tiny, misshapen gnome, working before a fiery furnace.

"Door closed and locked," Yancey reported.

"Ports all right," said Cabot.


"Okay," replied Pascal.

Machinery hummed faintly, nothing more than a whisper of a sound. . . .

There was nothing to indicate they had left the present, were moving backward through time, but when Yancey looked through a port, he choked back an exclamation. There was nothing outside the port. Just a blank, flat, gray plane of nothingness, with now and then shadows that flitted and were gone.

Pascal sucked in his breath as the tractor rocked and bumped. The gray outside the port grew less dense. Objects became faintly discernible.

"We're going too fast," Pascal explained. "Ground seems to be raising. Have to take



SCIENTIFUNCTION
HALL
OF
FAME
STORY

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time. Because "The Loot of Time," by Clifford D. Simak, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFUNCTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

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it slower. We might hit something. Most things wouldn't stop us, but there's no use taking chances."

"Sure the ground is rising," Cameron told him. "Maybe by this time there isn't any English channel. Back in the Riss-Wurm period the British Isles were connected with the continent. The Thames flowed north through the North Sea basin to reach the North Sea.

The gray outside the ports thinned even more. The tractor rocked like a boat in a gentle swell. Then the grayness turned to white, a dazzling white that blinded Yancey. The tractor moved sharply upward, seemed to be riding a huge wave, then dropped but more slowly.

"We just passed the Wurm glacier," Pascal told them. "We're in the Riss-Wurm now."

"Take it just a little easier," Cameron warned him. "That last bump busted a tube in the field radio. We can fix that, but we may need that radio. We don't want to smash it entirely."

Outside the port now Yancey could make out objects. A tree became clearer, was sharply defined and beyond it Yancey saw solid landscape, bathed in a rising sun.

He heard Pascal's voice.

"Seventy thousand years, approximately," he said. "We should be where we intended to go."

But Yancey was intent on the scene outside. The tractor stood on the top of a high knoll. Below unfolded a panorama of wild beauty. Rolling hills fell away to a wide val-

ley, green with lush grass, while in the distance a stream caught the sunlight of early dawn and glistened like a ribbon of silver. And on the hills and in the valley below, were black dots, feeding game herds, some so close he could make out individual animals. Others were mere black spots.

Yancey whistled soundlessly. He wheeled from the port. "Jack," he began breathlessly, "there are thousands of herds out there—"

But Cabot, he saw, had already unlocked the door.

THE four of them stood grouped in the doorway and stared out. Pascal smiled. "You see," he reminded them, "that I told you the truth."

Cabot drew in his breath sharply.

"You sure did," he admitted. "I doubt if Africa in its prime was better than this."

"An overlapping of fauna," said Pascal. "The Old Stone Age merging with the modern. One type dying out, another coming in. The most diversified and plentiful game herds that ever existed on the face of the earth before or since. The cave bear, the saber-tooth, the cave-hyena, the mammoth and woolly rhinoceros living coincidentally with vast herds of wild ox, reindeer, Irish elk and other animals of more recent times.

"Some hunting!" said Yancey.

Cabot nodded in agreement. He stepped down from the door onto the ground. "Let's stretch our legs," he suggested.

"Can't right now," said Cameron. "Have to check over the machinery. I want to be sure everything's all right."

Yancey jumped to the ground.

"You fellows had better take your rifles," warned Cameron.

Cabot laughed. "We have our revolvers," he said. "We aren't going far away."

The two hunters walked slowly wondering, away from the tractor. The ground beneath their feet was soft to the tread with thick grass. Head-high thickets spotted the hillsides that sloped away toward the river. On some of the hills reared great, grotesque rock formations. And everywhere was game.

Yancey halted and lifted a pair of binoculars to his eyes. For several minutes he stood studying the landscape. Then he lowered the glasses and slipped the thong from his neck. He handed them to Cabot.

"Take a look, Jack," he invited. "You won't believe it until you see it with your own eyes. There's a herd of mammoths down by

the river. That dark spot just this side of the big groove. And there's another big bunch up the river a bit. I picked up a few woolly rhinos. And bison, something like the old American buffalo."

"Bos bisons," said Cabot. "I read up some on Stone Age animals the last few weeks. Primitive form of bison. Maybe we'll be able to get a few Bos latifrons. Big brutes with a horn spread of ten feet. But maybe they're extinct. They're the grandpappies of those fellows out there."

"What's that big bunch across the river?" Yancey asked.

Cabot trained the glasses in the direction of Yancey's pointing finger.

"Irish elk," he pronounced.

A coughing roar brought the two men half-way around. What they saw held them petrified for a moment.

Less than a hundred feet away, at the edge of a thicket, through which he must have come without a sound, stood a massive bear. A huge beast, six feet at the shoulders. He was dark brown in color and he was angry. He rocked gently from side to side and champed his jaws. From his chest rumbled a growl that seemed to shake the earth.

"For Heaven's sake," hissed Cabot, "don't move fast! Edge over toward the tractor easy. That boy is ready to charge!"

Yancey's hand dropped to his gun butt. Out of the tail of his eyes Cabot caught the motion.

"Yancey, you fool," he whispered huskily, "keep your hand away from that. A forty-five slug wouldn't more than tickle him."

Slowly the two men backed away from the bear, back toward the towering gray form of the time-tractor, their eyes never leaving the monstrous beast that stood swaying before them. The bear was working himself into a rage. His chest rumbling was almost continuous now, like a train crossing a long trestle. He snarled and the snarl was a sound of raw fury that sent cold shivers up Cabot's spine.

CAUTIOUSLY they paced their slow backward march. Yancey's heel caught in a root and he stumbled, but righted himself quickly. The bear growled thunderously and shook his head. Foam from his drooling jaws flecked the massive brown shoulders.

Then the bear charged. With no apparent

preliminary move he launched into full motion, with the speed of an avalanche.

"Run," shrieked Cabot, but his cry was drowned out by a blasting report. The charging bear lurched forward, struck head and shoulders on the ground and somersaulted.

Cabot, racing toward the time-tractor saw Cameron and Pascal framed in the doorway, heavy elephant guns at their shoulders.

"Wait," roared Cabot. "Make the second shot count!"

In three leaps he was beside the tractor door.

Pascal shoved the gun at him.

"Never shot one before in my life," he told Cabot.

Cabot spun about, gun in hand. The bear was on its feet, swaying heavily from side to side. Its small pig eyes gleamed balefully and red foam flecked its jaws and shoulders.

Deliberately Cabot brought the gun-barrel up, centered the sights squarely between the two eyes and squeezed the trigger. The bear coughed gently and rolled over.

Yancey wiped his brow with the back of his hand. "Closest shave I've had," he confessed.

"Cave bear," said Pascal. "Just one of the big life-forms you will find here."

Cameron stepped down from the tractor. "You'll find out these animals aren't the gunshy brutes you two have been hunting," he stated. "These babies don't fear man. They figure man isn't dangerous, if in fact they've ever seen a man. The Neanderthals that are living somewhere in this country right now are no match for a brute like that."

Yancey wiped his brow again. "This is the strangest place I ever saw," he declared. "Jack and me just step out for a smoke and a look-around. We aren't gone five minutes and a bear jumps us."

Cameron guffawed. "Picked you out for breakfast," he said.

Yancey grimaced, but made no reply.

Suddenly Cabot hunched forward, finger pointing to a patch of tall grass beyond the dead bear.

"There's something in there!" he whispered harshly.

A tawny shape raced from the grass, landed on top of the bear's brown body. With glinting claws and powerful teeth it laid back the hide on the great shoulder. Then, seeing the men, it backed away, its face twisted into a blood stained snarl.

Yancey's .45 leaped out of its holster and exploded almost as it cleared. One explosion blending with another, the gun set up a roll of thunder that beat against the ears of the four men.

Still snarling, the tawny beast jerked to the impact of the heavy slugs. Then it sprawled and tumbled as Yancey's gun clicked on an empty cartridge.

But it was not dead. Snarling and spitting, it regained its feet, slunk low in a deadly slouch, razor-sharp, foot-long fangs bared in a murderous sneer.

Cabot whipped out his revolver as Yancey rapidly clicked new cartridges into the cylinder. Cameron snapped the elephant gun to his shoulder. The rifle bellowed and the cat rolled over. Cabot slid his gun back into the holster.

"Saber-tooth," said Pascal coolly.

"He sure carries lead," Yancey commented, breathing hard.

Cameron cradled the rifle in his arm and stared at the two animals. "Hunting?" he said. "This isn't hunting. This is an eternal Custer's last stand—a continuous battle in self-defense."

"Those critters sure are blood-thirsty," agreed Yancey.

"And," he added, "not afraid of us."

Cameron blew smoke through the gun barrel. "Wonder how cave bear steaks taste," he mused.

Yancey looked the huge animal over.

"Probably tougher than the devil," he said appraisingly.

CHAPTER II

The Centaurians

FROM the office of Time Travel, Inc., on the 600th story of the Berkley stratosphere building, New York lay stretched below, a fairy city. Under the soft glow of millions of lights it took on an unearthly beauty. It was a city of slender pinnacles of pure white beauty, looping arches of rainbow hues, formal gardens and parks, gleaming towers of argent, black domes.

Steve Clark liked the view. He often came here at night to sit and talk with his friend, Andy Smith, one of the ace pilots of the Time Travel service.

Smith was reading the last edition of the *Daily Rocket*. Steve Clark had brought it in only a moment before, fresh from the press and thrown it on the desk. Smith had it spread in the white circle thrown by the lone light. The rest of the office was in darkness. Beyond the desk lockers, other desks and record files loomed darkly. The time-machines themselves were in an adjoining room, ready for launching from the face of the building.

"How's business?" asked Clark, with his feet fixed firmly on the top of the desk.

Andy Smith grunted.

"Not so good. It's the Fifty-Sixth Century, time-travel isn't a novelty any more and our rates are too high. Didn't have more than a dozen or two trips all week." He jabbed his fingers at the purple headlines. "Times seem to be all right for you newspaper fellows," he said. "Lots of big news this afternoon."

"Yeah," Steve Clark agreed. "The Centaureans again. They're always good for a banner-line any day. Made a real haul this time."

"I should say so," Smith said. "Martian bongo stones, eh? Fourteen of them. Largest and most perfect collection in the entire Solar System."

"That's it," said Clark. "The old man almost busted a blood vessel when that story came in an hour ago. Wanted to scoop the city."

Clark chuckled. "We did," he said.

Andy Smith folded the paper carefully. "Steve," he said, "what are the Centaureans? Nobody seems to know."

"They're super-crooks for one thing," Clark said. "And when you've said that, you've said about all that anyone knows about them for sure. They've laughed at the best brains in the police business for the last five hundred years. And I figure they'll still be laughing five hundred years from now if they live that long and there's no reason to think they won't. Unless they're keeping it a secret, the flatfeet don't even know where their hideout is located. They've made monkeys out of everyone. Didn't they steal a gold shipment out from under the nose of the Interplanetary Police, and keep it, too, in spite of the fact that every IP man in the System was turned loose on the case?"

"You figure then," asked Smith, "that the Centaureans are real? That they are something that isn't human. A super-gang of un-

earthly bandits?"

"You know," Clark replied, "a newspaperman doesn't take to fables very easy. He breaks more myths than any other kind of critter I know. But as a newspaper man, I'm telling you that these Centaureans aren't human. Probably a lot of jobs have been blamed on them that they never had a thing to do with. But there are cases on record of eye-witnesses who saw them. Only two or three such instances in the last five hundred years, but they check up well.

"All agree on vital points. They got tails and they're covered with scales and instead of feet they have hoofs. Whatever they are, they don't go in for penny-ante stuff. When they make a haul, it's one that's worthwhile. Those bongo stones. They were worth ten billion if they were worth a dime. And the shipload of IP gold."

SMITH whistled. "Then you figure they came from Alpha Centauri?" he asked.

"Either Alpha Centauri or some other place outside the System. Nothing like them been found on any of the planets here. I always sort of figured they were fugitives from their own System. Maybe things got too hot for them, wherever they were, and they had to take it on the lam. Whatever they are or wherever they come from they sure have easy pickings here. They walk off with just about whatever they want to and nobody's ever come close to catching up with them."

"I read some place, long time ago, that it is believed they came to Earth in some sort of a crazy space ship. Wrecked when it struck. The ship was smashed up and two or three of its occupants were killed—but I guess they never did find out much about them from that. The ship was all in pieces and the things in it were crushed to pulp. Maybe it was something or somebody else, not the Centaureans at all."

Steve Clark lighted a Venus-weed cigar and puffed.

"Whatever they are," he said, "they make good news copy."

Smith glanced at his watch. "I'll be off in a few minutes," he said. "What say we hop over to Paris and buy us a round of drinks?"

"Sounds all right," agreed Clark.

Smith rose from his chair, stuffing the paper into his pocket. And standing there, beside the desk, he froze in astonishment.

The office door was open and inside it

stood a group of black-shrouded figures that seemed to blend with the darkness. Something gleamed in the light reflected from the polished table-top.

A voice spoke out of the darkness, a voice that spoke the English tongue with slurred accent.

"You will please resume your seat," it suggested.

Smith sat down again and Clark, dropping his feet from the desk, jerked his chair around.

"You also, sir," said the voice.

Clark obeyed. There was some metallic menace in those short, clipped, incredibly accented words which held a definite note of threat.

Slowly, majestically, one of the black-shrouded figures strode forward, leaving his companions by the door. He stopped before the desk, still in the darkness, but better defined now in the reflections from the desk-top. The man wore dark glasses and he was shrouded in a dark cape, the edge of which trailed to the floor, covering his feet. A black cowl, a part of the cape, covered his head and draped over his face, hiding most of his features.

Steve Clark felt the hair crawl at the back of his neck as he studied the visitor.

Smith made his voice pleasant. "Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"Yes, there is," said the strange black-draped figure and in the faint light Smith saw the quick, smooth flash of white teeth in the shadowed face. He couldn't make out the face. Couldn't see anything, in fact, except the flash of teeth when he spoke and the occasional dull shine of reflected light from the man's eyes.

The teeth flashed again. "I want a time-condenser," he said.

Andy Smith managed to choke back a gasp of astonishment, but his face was blank when he answered:

"We don't sell parts," he said.

"No," said the black-robed one and the single word sounded more like a challenge than a question.

"There is no call for them," Smith explained, "Time-Travel has the only time-machines in existence. They operate under strict governmental supervision. No one else owns a time-machine. Naturally, the only ones who would have use for spare parts would be our own company."

"But you have an extra condenser?"

"Several of them," Smith admitted. "We have need of replacements frequently. It's dangerous to go into time with a faulty condenser."

"I know that," the other replied. "Contrary to what you may believe, there is at least one time machine in existence other than the ones you own. I have one." Something like a chuckle sounded from his lips. "Strangely enough I obtained it from your company. Many years ago. I came here to get a condenser," said the man. The ugly muzzle of some sort of a weapon poked from the folds of his cape. "I can take it by force if need be. I would prefer not to. On the other hand, if you would cooperate, I would be willing to pay."

HE leaned closer to the desk. A hand flashed out of the cape, was visible for only an instant and then disappeared inside the cape again. But the hand had tossed several small round objects on the desk-top objects that seemed to spin in a blaze of color under the lamp-light.

"Bongo stones," said the white teeth. "Not the ones stolen this afternoon. No way to identify them. But bongo stones. Worth a fortune."

Steve Clark stared at the stones, his mind spinning.

Bongo stones! He counted them. Ten of them! In a flash he knew who this visitor was, knew that the myth of the Centaurians was true. For he had glimpsed that hand during the swift instant it had tossed the stones on the desk-top. A scaly hand, like the paw of a reptile. And the clicking of the thing's feet when it walked was like the sound of cloven hoofs.

Through his buzzing mind came the voice. "And now suppose I take a condenser under my arm and walk out. Leaving the stones behind."

Smith hesitated.

The muzzle of the weapon gestured imperiously, impatiently.

"Otherwise," said the cold voice, "I shall kill you, and take the condenser in any event."

Smith rose and walked mechanically to a locker. Steve Clark heard the rasp of a key as his friend opened the door to take out a condenser.

But he still stared at the bongo stones.

Now he knew why the police had never found the Centaurians' hiding place. They

had no hiding place! They were bandits in time! They had the whole scope of space and time for their operations! They could sack the Queen of Sheba's mines one day and the next day move on to snatch treasures out of the remote future, treasures yet undreamed of!

"Clever," he said. "Clever!" Andy Smith was standing beside him looking at the stones. They were alone in the room.

"You gave them the condenser?" Clark asked.

Smith nodded dry-lipped. "There wasn't anything else I could do, Steve."

Clark motioned toward the stones. "What about those, Andy?"

"I was thinking," Smith said. "We couldn't sell them here—or anywhere else. They'd ask us how we got them. They'd lock us up. Probably before they go through with it, they'd prove we stole them and send us to the Moon-mines."

"There's a way," Clark suggested. He nodded toward the hangar where the time-machines were ranged.

Smith wet his lips. "I thought of that," he said. "After all those fellows stole a time-machine from the company once. Probably the company never reported the loss. Afraid of what the government might do."

Silence hung like a breathing menace over the room.

"Those were the Centaurians, weren't they?" Andy Smith asked.

Clark nodded. Then waited.

"The company will throw me out for this," said Smith bitterly. "After ten years of working with them."

Pounding feet sounded in the corridor outside.

Clark's hand shot out and scooped up the stones.

"Can't let anyone find us with these on us," he whispered, huskily. "Let's duck into the hangar."

Swiftly the two leaped through the doorway into the darkened room. Crouched under the wing of one of the time-fliers they saw figures come into the room they had just quitted. Figures in police uniforms.

The police stood stock-still in the center of the room, staring.

"What's going on here?" shouted one of them.

Silence fell more heavily.

"What do you think that fellow meant, telling us he saw some funny looking birds

coming out of here?" one of them asked the other two.

"Let's look in the hangar," one of the policemen said. He leveled a flash and a spear of light cut the deep gloom, just missing the two men crouched under the wing of the time-flier.

Clark felt Smith tugging at him. "We got to get out of here," Smith said in his ear.

Clark nodded in the darkness. And he knew there was only one way to get out of there.

Together they tumbled through the door of the time-flier.

"Here we go," said Smith. "We're criminals now, Steve."

The machine lurched out through the suddenly opened lock.

The time mechanism hummed and two men, one with ten bongo stones in his pocket, fled through time.

CHAPTER III

Anachronic Treasure

GRIMLY old One-Eye was fighting his last battle. His great stone ax lay out of reach, its handle broken, swept from his hand by a blow aimed at him by the mighty cat. His body was mauled and across one shoulder was a deep wound from which a stream of crimson trickled down his hairy chest.

To flee was useless. One-Eye knew that he could not out-distance Saber-Tooth. There was only one thing to do—stand and fight. So with shoulders hunched, with his hands poised and ready for action, with his one eye gleaming balefully, the Neanderthal man faced the cat.

The animal snarled and spat, its tail twitching, crouched for a leap. Its long, curved fangs slashed angrily at the air.

One-Eye had no delusions about what was going to happen. He had killed many saber-tooths in his life. In company with others of his kind, he had faced the charge of the great cave-bear. He had trailed and brought down the mighty mammoth. In his day One-Eye had been a great hunter, an invincible warrior. But now he had reached the end of life. A man's two hands were no weapon against the tooth and claw of a saber-toothed

tiger. One-Eye knew he was going to be killed.

Dry brush crackled back of the cat and the saber-tooth pivoted swiftly at this threat of new danger from the rear. One-Eye straightened and froze in his tracks.

Conrad Yancey, standing at the edge of the brush, slowly raised his rifle.

"I reckon this has gone about far enough," he said. "A man's got to stick by his own kind."

Startled, the great cat's snarls rose into a siren of hate and fear.

Yancey lined the sights on the ugly head and squeezed the trigger. The saber-tooth leaped into the air, screaming in rage and terror. Again the rifle blazed and the cat straightened, reared on its hind legs, fell backward to the ground, coughing great streams of blood. Across the body of the beast One-Eye and Yancey exchanged glances.

"You put up a swell battle," Yancey told the Neanderthaler. "I watched you for quite a spell. Glad I was around to help."

Petrified by terror, One-Eye stood stock-still, staring. His nostrils twitched as he sniffed the strange smells which had come with the stranger and his shining spear. The spear, when it spoke in a voice of thunder, had a smell all its own, a smell that stung One-Eye's sensitive nostrils and his throat and made him want to cough.

Yancey took a slow, tentative step toward the Neanderthaler. But when the sub-man stirred as if to flee, he stopped short and stood almost breathless.

Yancey saw that the Neanderthaler's left eye at some time had been scooped out of his head by the vicious blow of a cruelly taloned paw. Deep scratches and a tortuous malformation of the region about the cheek-bone told a story of some terrible battle of the wilderness.

Short of stature and slightly stooping of posture, the Neanderthaler was a model of awkward power. His head was thrust forward at an angle between his shoulders. His neck was thick as a tree boll. The long arms hung almost to the knees of the bowed legs and the body was completely covered with hair. The heavy bristle of hair on his enormously projecting eyebrows was snowy white and throughout the heavy coat of hair which covered the man were other streaks and sprinklings of gray and white.

"An old buck," said Yancey, half to him-

self. "Slowing down. Some day he won't move fast enough and a cat will have him."

CONRAD YANCEY took another slow step forward and this time the Neanderthaler, bristling with terror, wheeled about with a strange, strangled cry of fear and ran, shuffling awkwardly, down the hill to plunge straight into a dense thicket.

Back at the time-tractor camp Yancey told the story of the battle between the caveman and the cat, of how he watched and had finally stepped in to save the man's life.

But the others had stories, too. Cabot and Cameron, hunting together a few miles to the east, had been charged by an angry mammoth bull, had stopped him only after they had placed four well aimed heavy-caliber bullets into him. Pascal, remaining at the tractor, had scared off a cave bear and reported that a pack of five vicious, slinking wolves had patrolled the camp throughout the afternoon. He had shot two of them and then the rest had scattered.

For here was a land that was teeming with game; a land where the law of claw and fang ruled and was the only law; where big animals preyed on smaller animals and in turn were preyed upon by still bigger ones. Here was a land without human habitation, with the few Neanderthalers who did live here hiding in dark, dank caves. Here was a land that had no human tenets, no softening hand of civilization.

But here, in this primeval wilderness of what later was to become the British Isles, was the greatest hunting ground Cabot and Yancey had ever seen. They shot in self-defense as often as they shot to bring down marked game. They found that a cave bear would carry more lead than an elephant, that the saber-tooth was not so hard to kill as might be thought, that only superb marksmanship and the heaviest bullets would bring the mammoth to his knees.

The flickering campfire, lighting up the gray, shadowy bulk of the time-tractor, was the only evidence of civilized life upon the darkening world as a blood-red moon climbed over the eastern horizon and lighted a land that growled and snarled, shivered and whimpered, hunted and was hunted.

Yancey saw One-Eye lurking on the edge of the camp when he arose in the morning. He had just a glimpse of the old fellow, squatting in a clump of bushes, looking over the camp with his one good eye. He disap-

peared so quickly, so soundlessly that Yancey blinked and rubbed his eyes, hardly believing he had left.

In the field that day Yancey and Cabot caught sight of him several times, lurking in their wake, spying upon them,

"Maybe," Cabot suggested, "he is trying to get up enough courage to thank you for saving his life."

Yancey grunted.

"I had to do that, Jack," he said. "He isn't more than an animal, but he's still a man. We got to play along with our own kind in a place like this. He was such a brave old cuss. Standing there, ready to go to bat with that cat with his bare hands."

Back at the camp, Pascal looked at it in a scientific light. "Just natural curiosity," he said. "The first glimmering of intelligence. Trying to figure things out. With what limited brain power he had the old fellow is doing some heavy thinking right now."

"Maybe he recognizes you as one of his descendants. Great-grandson to the hundredth generation, maybe," Cameron jibed at Yancey.

"The Neanderthal race is not the ancestor of man," Pascal protested. "They died out or were killed off by the Cro-Magnons, who'll be moving in within another ten or twenty thousand years. The Neanderthals were just a sort of blind alley. An experiment that didn't go quite right."

"Seems human, though," protested Yancey.

ONE-EYE became a camp fixture. He lurked around the tractor, trailed Yancey when he went afield. Degree by degree he became bolder. Meat was left where he could find it and he carried it off into the brush. Later he didn't bother to drag it off. In plain view of the hunters he squatted on his haunches, ripping and rending it, snarling softly, gulping great, bloody mouthfuls of raw flesh.

He haunted the campfire like a dog, apparently pleased with the easy living he had found. He came farther away from the encircling brush, squatted and jabbered just outside the circle of firelight, waiting for the bits of food tossed to him.

At last, seemingly convinced he had nothing to fear from these strange creatures, he joined the campfire circle, saw with the men, blinking at the campfire, jabbering away excitedly.

"Maybe he has a language," said Pascal,

"but if he has it's very primitive. Not more than a dozen words at most."

He liked to have his back scratched, grunting like a contented hog. He begged for cubes of sugar.

"Makes a nice pet," Cameron declared.

But Yancey shook his head. "Something more than a pet. Hugh," he said.

For between Yancey and the old Neanderthal something akin to comradeship had developed. It was by Yancey that the old one-eyed savage sat when he came into the ring of firelight. It was at Yancey that he directed his chatter. During the day he haunted Yancey's footsteps like a shadow, at times coming out openly to join him, ambling along with his awkward gait.

One night Yancey gave him a knife, half wondering if One-Eye would know what it was. But One-Eye recognized in this wondrous piece of polished metal something akin to the fist ax that he and his people used to flay the pelts from the animals they killed.

Turning the knife over and over, One-Eye slobbered in delirious glee. He jabbered excitedly at Yancey, clawed at the man's shoulder with caressing paw. Then he leaped from his place by the camp-fire and slithered away into the darkness. Not so much as a breaking twig heralded his plunge into the night.

Yancey rubbed his eyes. "I wonder what the damn old fool is up to now?" he asked.

"Went off to try his new knife," suggested Cabot. "Something like that calls for a little throat-slitting."

Yancey listened to the moaning of a saber-tooth in the brush only a short distance away, heard the bellow of a mammoth down by the river.

He shook his head dolefully. "I sure hope he watches his step," he said. "He's slowing up. Getting old. That saber-tooth out there might get him."

But in fifteen minutes One-Eye was back again. He waddled into the circle of firelight so silently that the men did not hear his approach.

Looking over his shoulder, Yancey saw him standing back of him. One-Eye was holding out a clenched fist, but within the fist was something that glinted in the flare of the campfire.

Pascal caught his breath. "He's brought you something," he told Yancey. "Something in exchange for the knife. I would never have believed it. The barter principle."

Yancey rose and held out his hand. One-Eye dropped the shiny thing into it. Living flame lanced from it, striking Yancey's eyeballs.

It was a stone. Yancey rotated it slowly with his fingers and saw that within its center dwelt a heart of icy blue flame, while from its many facets swarmed arcing colors of breath-taking beauty. Cabot was at his elbow, staring.

"What is it, Yancey?" he gasped.

Yancey almost sobbed.

"It's a diamond," he said. "A diamond as big as my fist!"

"But it's cut," protested Cabot. "That's not a stone out of the rough. A master jeweler cut that stone!"

Yancey nodded. "Just what would a cut diamond be doing in the old Stone Age?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV

The Broadcast in Time

ONE-EYE pointed down into the throat of a cave and jabbered violently at Yancey. The hunter patted the hoary shoulders and One-Eye danced with glee.

"This must be it," Yancey said.

"I hope so," said Cameron. "It's taken plenty of time to make him understand what we wanted. I still can't understand how we did it."

Cabot wagged his head. "I can't understand any of it," he confessed. "A Neanderthaler lugging around cut diamonds. Diamonds as big as a man's fist."

"Well, let's go down and see for ourselves," suggested Yancey.

One-Eye led the way down the steep, slippery mouth of the cave and into a dimly lit cavern, filled with a sort of half-light that filtered in from the mouth of the cave on the ground above.

Cabot switched on a flashlight and cried out excitedly.

In cascading piles upon the floor of the cavern, stacked high against its rocky sides, were piles of jewels that flashed and glittered, scintillating in the beams of the torch.

"This is it!" yelled Cameron.

Pascal, down on his knees in front of a pile of jewels, dipped his hands into them,

lifted a fistful and let them trickle back. They filled the cavern with little murmurings as they fell.

Cabot swept the cave with the light. They saw piles of jewels; neat stacks of gold ingots, apparently freshly smelted; bars of silver-white iridium; of argent platinum; chests of hammered bronze and copper; buckskin bags spilling native golden nuggets.

Yancey reached out a hand and leaned weakly against the wall.

"My gosh," he stammered. "The price of empires!"

"But," said Pascal slowly, calmly, although his face, as Cabot's torch suddenly lighted it, was twisted in an agony of disbelief, "how did this all come here? This is a primitive world. The art of the goldsmith and the jewel-cutter is unknown here."

Cameron's voice cut coolly out of the darkness.

"There must be an explanation. Some reason. Some previous civilization. A treasure cache of that civilization."

"No," Pascal told him, "not that. Look at those gold bars. New. Freshly smelted. No sign of age. And platinum—that's a comparatively recent discovery. Iridium even more recent."

Cabot's voice held an edge of steel command.

"We can argue about how it got here after we have stowed it away," he said. "Pascal, you and Hugh go down, and bring up the tractor. Yancey and I will start carrying this stuff up to the surface right away."

Yancey toiled up the throat of the cave. Reaching the surface he slid the sack of jewels from his shoulder and wiped his brow.

"Tough work," he told Cameron.

Cameron nodded. "But it's almost over now," he comforted. "Just a few more hours and we'll have the last of the stuff in the tractor. Then we get out of here."

Yancey nodded. "I don't feel too safe," he admitted. "Somebody hid all this junk in the cave. How they did it, I don't have the faintest idea. But I have a queer feeling it wouldn't go easy with us if they caught us."

Pascal staggered out of the cave and slid a gold bar from his shoulder. He mopped his brow with a shirt sleeve.

"I'm going down to the tractor and get a drink of water before I pack that a foot farther," he announced.

Yancey stooped to pick up his gunny sack. Pascal's scream echoed.

THE hillside below the tractor before had been empty of everything except a few scattered boulders and trees. Now a machine rested there, a grotesque machine of black metal, streamlined with stubby wings, suggestive of a plane. As Yancey caught his first sight of it, it was indistinct, blurred, as if he saw it through a shimmering haze. Then it became clear, sharp-cut.

Like a slap in the face came the knowledge that here was the answer to those vague fears he had felt. Here must be the owners of the treasure cache.

His hand slapped down to his thigh and his gun whispered out of its holster.

A door in the strange machine snapped open and out of it stepped a man—but hardly a man. The creature sported a long tail, and it was covered with scales. Twin horns, three inches or so in height, sprouted from its forehead. The newcomer carried something that looked like a gun in his hand, but no gun such as Yancey had ever seen. He saw the weapon tilt up toward him and his .45 exploded in his fist. Even as flame blossomed from his gun, he saw a .45 come up in Cameron's hand, in the second after the blast of his own gun, then heard the deadly click of a cocking hammer.

The first of the scaly men was down. But others were tumbling out of the strange mechanism.

Cameron's gun barked and once again Yancey felt the comforting kick of the .45 against the heel of his palm, hardly knowing he had squeezed the trigger.

From one of the guns carried by the scaly men whipped out a pencil of purple flame. Yancey felt its hot breath clip past his cheek. Before the time-tractor lay Pascal, stretched out, inert, like an empty sack. Over him stood Cabot, gun flaming. Another one of those purple flames reached out, hit a boulder beside Yancey. The boulder glowed with sudden heat, started to chip and crack.

With mighty leaps, Yancey skidded down the slope, landing in a crouch beside Pascal. He grasped the old scientist by the shoulder and lifted him. As he straightened he glanced at the strange machine in which the scaly men had come. Through the open door he could see a mass of machinery, with banks of glowing tubes.

Then the machinery erupted in a thunder-

ous explosion. The roar seemed to blot out the world. For one split second he glanced up and saw on Cabot's face a baleful grin of triumph, knew that he had fired a shot which had wrecked the scaly men's machine.

The ground seemed to be weaving under Yancey's feet. With superhuman effort he plodded toward the door of the time-tractor dragging Pascal. Hands reached out to help him, hauling him inside.

Slowly his brain cleared. He was sitting on the floor of the tractor. Beside him lay Pascal and he saw now that the scientist was dead. His chest had been burned away by one of the pencils of purple flame.

Cabot swung down on the door-locking mechanism and stepped back into the room.

"What are they, Jack?" Yancey asked, his mind still fuzzy.

Cabot shook his head wearily.

"Don't you recognize them?" asked Cameron. "Horns, hoofs, tails. Today we've seen the devil in person. Those are the people who gave rise to the ancient legend of the devil."

Yancey got to his feet and looked down at Pascal. "Feel bad about that," he whispered. "He was a regular guy."

Cameron nodded, stiff-lipped. From a port Cabot spoke: "Those devil-men are up to something," he announced. "They'll make it hot for us now."

He wheeled on Cameron.

"Can you get us out of here, Hugh?"

Cameron considered the question.

"Probably could," he said, "but I would rather not try it right now. I think we're safe here for a little while. That time brain is a tricky outfit. Know its principle and given time I could figure it out so I could take a try at it. If worse comes to worse I'll do it. Take a chance."

HE WALKED to the time-brain apparatus and snapped the switch. The brain glowed with a weird green light.

"That must be a time-machine out there," said Yancey. "Another machine would explain the treasure cache. I'll bet those birds are robbing stuff through time and bringing it back here to cache it. Clever."

"And they landed up ahead to cache some stuff and found some of it missing. Then they came back through time to find out what was wrong," supplied Cabot.

Cameron smote his thigh. "Listen," he said. "If that's right it means time-travel

is well established up ahead in the future. We might be able to reach help there. Those fellows out there must be outlaws. If so, we'd rate some help."

"But how will we reach the future?" demanded Cabot. "How will they know we need help?"

"It's just a chance," said Cameron. "A bare chance. If it doesn't work I can always try to get us back to the Twentieth Century, although the chances are nine out of ten I'll kill all of us trying it."

"But how?" persisted Cabot.

"Pascal said the 'time force' or whatever the brain generates, is similar to electricity. But with differences. It is important just what those differences are. I don't know, not enough anyhow. The time mechanism is run by the force generated by the brain, but we have regular electricity for the tractor operation."

Cameron pondered.

"I wonder," he mused, "if the time force would be sufficiently like electricity to operate the radio?"

"What difference would that make?" snapped Yancey.

"Maybe we could broadcast in time," Cameron suggested.

"But that brain generates very little power," protested Yancey.

"We might not need much power," Cameron told him. "It's just a blind shot in the dark. A gamble—"

"Sounds plausible," Yancey asserted. "Let's take a long shot."

Cameron switched off the brain mechanism and with lengths of wire connected the radio to the mechanism. Then he switched the brain back on again. The sending set hummed with power.

"Better start gambling," said Cabot. "Those boys out there are beginning to ray us. Playing that purple flame on the tractor."

Cameron's voice boomed out, speaking into the microphone."

"SOS . . . SOS . . . Party of time travelers stranded in the Thames valley, near the village of Aylesford, approximately seventy thousand years before the Twentieth Century. Attacked by beings resembling the devils of mythology. SOS . . . SOS . . . Party of time travelers stranded in the Thames valley—"

Cameron's voice boomed on and on.

Yancey and Cabot stared out of the ports.

The devil-men were ringed around the tractor, playing the purple beams on the machine. They stood stolidly, like statues, without a trace of emotion in their features.

The tractor was beginning to heat up. The air was becoming hot and the metal was warm to the touch.

The interior of the tractor suddenly flashed with a green burst of flame.

Yancey and Cabot wheeled about.

The brain mechanism was a mass of twisted wreckage.

"Blew up," said Cabot. "Something in the purple rays. This is the end of us now if our time-casting didn't work. We can't even operate the time-mechanism without the brain."

"Look here!" cried Cabot from a port.

Cameron and Yancey rushed to his side.

Swooping down toward the tractor was a black ship, an exact duplicate of the time machine of the devil-men.

Like an avenging meteor the black craft tore downward. From its nose flashes of green fire stabbed out viciously and living lightning bolts crashed among the devil-men.

Terrified, the devil-men tried to scurry out of reach, but the lightning bolts sought them out, caught them, burned them into cinders.

"A ship out of the future!" gasped Yancey. "Our radio worked!"

CHAPTER V

The Thrill-Hunters

ANDY SMITH spoke earnestly. "There's just one thing," he said. "We can't go back to the Fifty-Sixth Century. Steve and I stole this time-machine. Lucky for you fellows we did, because apparently no one else caught your radio message. But if we're caught back there, it means a life stretch on Mercury for us. Our machine is the second one ever stolen. The first one is over there."

He nodded toward the devil-men's machine, blasted on the hillside.

"Well," said Yancey, "what are we blabbering around about? We have a machine that will take us through time and space. Any place we want to go. There's plenty of room for all of us. The ship's loaded

with treasure. Do we have to decide where to go? Why can't we just shop around and stop wherever things look good to us? Like those Centaureans. Me, I don't care whether I ever go back to the Twentieth Century. I didn't leave anybody back there."

"Just an old maid aunt," Cabot spoke for himself. "And she didn't approve of me. Figured I should have settled down and made more money—added to the family fortune. Thought hunting was silly."

The four of them looked at Cameron. He grinned. "I'd like to find out something about what the next couple, three hundred thousand years have done in the way of science," he admitted. "Maybe we could pick up a few tricks. Skim the cream of the world's science. Probably lots of ideas we could incorporate in the time-flier."

"Wish we knew more about that time-brain," mourned Smith. "But I can't understand it. The Fifty-Sixth hasn't anything like it. Our machines are run on an entirely different basis. Warping of world lines principle."

They sat in silence for a moment. From the river came the roaring bellow of a mammoth bull.

"Say," asked Yancey, "has anyone seen anything of One-Eye?"

"No," said Cameron. "He must have hit for high timber when all the fireworks broke out."

"By the way," asked Steve Clark, "what are you going to do with Pascal's boy?"

"Leave it here," suggested Yancey, "in the tractor. If we worked a million years we couldn't erect a more suitable burial site. Shut the door and leave him there. With his time brain. No one else will ever build another. It was all in Pascal's head. No notes, nothing. Just his brain. He told me he meant to write a book when he got around to it. We can't take the body back to the Twentieth Century and deliver it to the authorities. Because nobody would believe us. They'd throw us in the can."

"We might take it back and leave it somewhere on his premises for someone to find," Cabot suggested.

Yancey shook his head. "That would be senseless. Just stir up a lot of fuss. An autopsy and an inquest and Scotland Yard half nuts over a new mystery. Pascal would rather be left here."

"I'm inclined to agree," said Cameron.

"That's settled then," said Smith getting

to his feet. "What do you say we get started? We got lots of places to go."

Clark laughed. "You know," he said, sweeping a hand toward the wrecked time-flier. "I get a big kick out of the way this Centaurean business turned out. For five hundred years those long-tailed gangsters just toured all over, robbing everything that looked like it was worth taking. Dragging it back into prehistoric time and hiding it away. And in the end all their work was done so that five Earthmen could use it to finance a life-time of time wandering."

Andy Smith looked thoughtful.

"But," he said, "the Centaureans must have been robbing for some purpose. They must have had something in mind. They amassed billions of dollars in treasure. For what reason? Not just for the love of it, surely. Not just to look at. Not just for the thrill of taking it. What were they going to do with it?"

"There," said Cameron, "is one question that will never be answered." . . .

ILD ONE-EYE squatted inside the time-tractor.

It was snowing outside, but the tractor provided an excellent shelter and One-Eye was well wrapped in furs and skins. In one corner of the tractor was plenty of food.

Wrapped to his ears in a great mastodon robe, One-Eye nodded sleepily. Life was pleasant for the old Neanderthal. Pleasant and easy. For the tribe which had wandered into the valley and found him living in the shining cave had taken him for a god. As a result they brought him food and furs, weapons and other offerings, gifts to appease his wrath, to court his favor. For who could doubt that anyone but a god would live in a cave that glistened in the sunshine, a cave made of hard, smooth stone, beautifully shaped, a cave that had no draughts and was secure against the attack of any wild beast.

One-Eye, dozing, dimly remembered the day when, curiously and idly jiggling at the door handle of the tractor, the handle moved in his hand and the door had swung smoothly open.

Henceforward the tractor had become One-Eye's cave. In it he had lived through many summers and many snows. In it he would live out the rest of his day.

One-Eye remembered the strange friends who had come to him in this shining cave. They had gone, long ago. And One-Eye missed them. Vaguely he was lonesome for

them. Many times he wished they might come back again.

The old Neanderthaler drew in his breath with a slobbering sigh. Perhaps some day they would. In the meantime, he kept a close and jealous guard and maintained the proper respect to the one of them that had stayed behind, the one whose bones lay neatly arranged in one corner of the tractor.

But they had remembered One-Eye before they left these other friends of his. Of that One-Eye was sure.

Had they not left behind them, in the tractor, for him to find, the great shining stone which he had given them so long ago in exchange for the shining knife?

One-Eye slobbered pleasurably now as he looked at the stone, sparkling and flashing

with hidden fire as it lay in the palm of his hand. One-Eye could not know that the stone had been left in the tractor accidentally, overlooked by the 20th and 56th century men before they left on their excursion into time. Not knowing this, One-Eye held close to him the thought that these friends of his had left behind a token—a token that some day, perhaps, they would return and sit around a fire with him and give him bones to gnaw and scratch his back where it itched the most.

Outside the wind howled dismally and the snow slanted down in a new fury. A blizzard raged over the Thames valley.

But One-Eye, snug in his furs, comfortable in his old age, a god to his contemporaries, played with a diamond the size of a man's fist, unmindful of the weather.