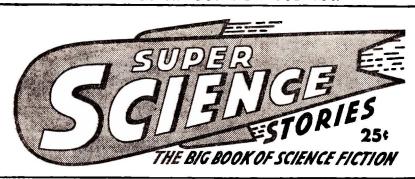
## THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION



VOL. 5 SEPTEMBER, 1949	No.
THREE UNFORGETTABLE NOVELS	
Wisdom was his destiny—learn and conquer his creed until	in an
atom-scarred universe there was but one thing left to overcome—MINUS DANGER!	mith 66 ew to
THE METAL MOON  In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men for peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight-armed Arnolas Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods	und a scs of
SHORT STORIES	
She had waited cons for her subjects—until the dark day she a to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!	
THE MINIATURE  In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between bir death But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, who was more precious than diamonds?	th and whose
WORLD OF NO RETURN	alton 56 ot live
STAR-BROTHER Stanley M  Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the str  comradeship the stars had seen to build, from its mind wren  horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets!	rangest
DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES	
POPULAR FILMS Ted I FANDOM'S CORNER Conducted by James V. Ta LAWRENCE PORTFOLIO THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER Conducted by Frederick MISSIVES AND MISSILES The Re Illustrations by Lawrence, Finlay, Van Dongen, Paul and Leyde Cover by Lawrence	urasi 7 55 Pohl 100

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## THE MINIATURE

In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between birth and death. . . . But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, whose body was more precious than diamonds?

## By Peter Reed

stepped through the bronze, marble and black-glass doorway of the City National Bank on Wall Street, he felt the strange jar. It was, he thought, almost a tremor. Once he had been in Tepoztlan, Mexico, on a Guggenheim grant, doing research on primitive barter systems, and during the night a small earthquake had awakened him.

This was much the same feeling. But he stood inside the bank and heard the unruffled hum of activity, heard no shouts of surprise. And, even through the heavy door he could hear the conversation of passers-by on the sidewalk.

He shrugged, beginning to wonder if it was something within himself, some tiny constriction of blood in the brain. It had been a trifle like that feeling which comes just before fainting. Jedediah Amberson had fainted once.

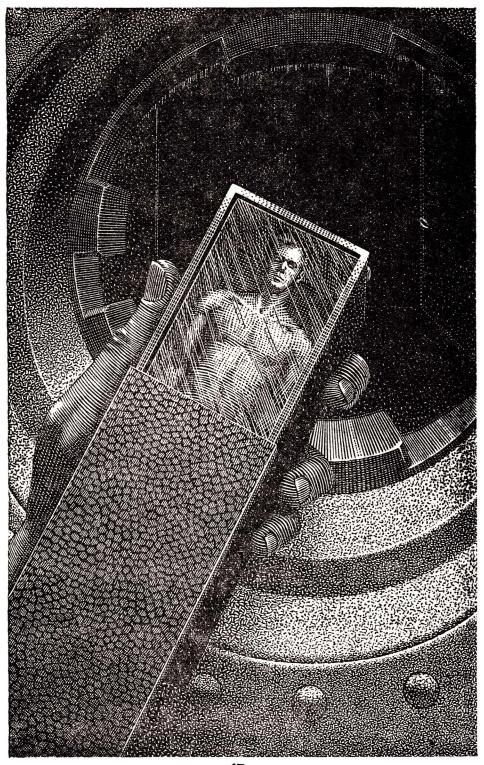
Fumbling in his pocket for the check-book, he walked, with his long loose stride, over to a chest-high marble counter. He hadn't been in the main office of the bank since he had taken

out his account. Usually he patronized the branch near the University, but to-day, finding himself in the neighborhood and remembering that he was low on cash, he had decided to brave the gaudy dignity of the massive institution of finance.

For, though Jed Amberson dealt mentally in billions, and used such figures familiarly in dealing with his classes in economics, he was basically a rather timid and uncertain man and he had a cold fear of the scornful eyes of tellers who might look askance at the small check he would present at the window.

He made it out for twenty dollars, five more than he would have requested had he gone to the familiar little branch office.

Jedediah Amberson was not a man to take much note of his surroundings. He was, at the time, occupied in writing a text, and the problems it presented were so intricate that he had recently found himself walking directly into other pedestrians and being snatched



back onto the curb by helpful souls who didn't want to see him truck-mashed before their eyes. Just the day before he had gone into his bedroom in midafternoon to change his shoes and had only awakened from his profound thoughts when he found himself, clad in pajamas, brushing his teeth before the bathroom mirror.

He took his place in the line before a window. He was mentally extrapolating the trend line of one of J. M. Keynes' debt charts when a chill voice said, "Well!"

He found that he had moved up to the window itself and the teller was waiting for his check. He flushed and said, "Oh! Sorry." He tried to push the check under the grill, but it fluttered out of his hand. As he stooped to get it, his hat rolled off.

At last recovering both hat and check, he stood up, smiled painfully and pushed the check under the grill.

The young man took it, and Jed Amberson finally grew aware that he was spending a long time looking at the check. Jed strained his neck around and looked to see if he had remembered to sign it. He had.

Only then did he notice the way the young man behind the window was dressed. He wore a deep wine-colored sports shirt, collarless and open at the throat. At the point where the counter bisected him, Jedediah could see that the young man wore green-gray slacks with at least a six-inch waistband of ocher yellow.

Jed had a childlike love of parties, sufficient to overcome his chronic self-consciousness. He said, in a pleased tone, "Ah, some sort of festival?"

The teller had a silken wisp of beard on his chin. He leaned almost frighteningly close to the grill, aiming the wisp of beard at Amberson as he gave him a careful scrutiny. "We are busy here," the teller said...
"Take your childish little game across street and attempt it on them."

Though shy, Jedediah was able to call on hidden stores of indignation when he felt himself wronged. He straightened slowly and said, with dignity, "I have an account here and I suggest you cash my check as quickly and quietly as possible."

The teller glanced beyond Jedediah and waved the silky beard in a taut half circle, a "come here" gesture.

Jedediah turned and gasped as he faced the bank guard. The man wore a salmon-pink uniform with enormously padded shoulders. He had a thumb hooked in his belt, his hand close to the plastic bowl of what seemed to be a child's bubble pipe.

The guard jerked his other thumb toward the door and said, "Ride off, honorable sir."

Jedediah said, "I don't care much for the comic-opera atmosphere of this bank. Please advise me of my balance and I will withdraw it all and put it somewhere where I'll be treated properly."

The guard reached out, clamped Jed's thin arm in a meaty hand and yanked him in the general direction of the door. Jed intensely disliked being touched or pushed or pulled. He bunched his left hand into a large knobbly fist and thrust it with vigor into the exact middle of the guard's face.

The guard grunted as he sat down on the tile floor. The ridiculous bubble pipe came out, and was aimed at Jed. He heard no sound of explosion, but suddenly there was a large cold area in his middle that felt the size of a basketball. And when he tried to move, the area of cold turned into an area of pain so intense that it nauseated him. It took but two tiny attempts to

prove to him that he could achieve relative comfort only by standing absolutely still. The ability to breathe and to turn his eyes in their sockets seemed the only freedom of motion left to him.

The guard said, tenderly touching his puffed upper lip, "Don't drop signal, Harry. We can handle this without flicks." He got slowly to his feet, keeping the toy weapon centered on Jedediah.

Other customers stood at a respectful distance, curious and interested. A fussy little bald-headed man came trotting up, carrying himself with an air of authority. He wore pastel-blue pajamas with a gold medallion over the heart.

The guard stiffened. "Nothing we can't handle, Mr. Greenbush."

"Indeed!" Mr. Greenbush said, his voice like a terrier's bark. "Indeed! You seem to be creating enough disturbance at this moment. Couldn't you have exported him more quietly?"

"Bank was busy," the teller said. "I didn't notice him till he got right up to window."

Mr. Greenbush stared at Jedediah. He said, "He looks reasonable enough, Palmer. Turn it off."

Jed took a deep, grateful breath as the chill area suddenly departed. He said weakly, "I demand an explanation." Mr. Greenbush took the check the teller handed him and, accompanied by the guard, led Jed over to one side. He smiled in what was intended to be a fatherly fashion. He said, glancing at the signature on the check, "Mr. Amberson, surely you must realize, or your patrons must realize, that City National Bank is not sort of organization to lend its facilities to inane promotional gestures."

Jedediah had long since begun to have a feeling of nightmare. He stared at the little man in blue pajamas. "Promotional gestures?"

"Of course, my dear fellow. For what other reason would you come here dressed as you are and present this . . . this document."

"Dressed?" Jed looked down at his slightly baggy gray suit, his white shirt, his blue necktie and cordovan shoes. Then he stared around at the customers of the bank who had long since ceased to notice the little tableau. He saw that the men wore the sort of clothes considered rather extreme at the most exclusive of private beaches. He was particularly intrigued by one fellow who wore a cerise silk shirt, open to the waist, emerald green shorts to his knees, and calf-length pink nylons.

The women, he noticed, all wore dim shades of deep gray or brown, and a standard costume consisting of a halter, a short flared skirt that ended just above the knees and a knit cap pulled well down over the hair.

Amberson said, "Uh. Something special going on."

"Evidently. Suppose you explain."

"Me explain! Look, I can show you identification. I'm an Associate Professor of Economics at Columbia and I—" He reached for his hip pocket. Once again the ball of pain entered his vitals. The guard stepped over to him, reached into each of his pockets in turn, handed the contents to Mr. Greenbush.

Then the pressure was released. "I am certainly going to give your high-handed procedures here as much publicity as I can," Jed said angrily.

But Greenbush ignored him. Greenbush had opened his change purse and had taken out a fifty-cent piece. Greenbush held the coin much as a superstitious savage would have held a mirror. He made tiny bleating sounds. At last he said, his voice thin and strained, "Nineteen forty-nine mint condition! What do you want for it?"

"Just cash my check and let me go," Jed said wearily. "You're all crazy here. Why shouldn't this year's coins be in mint condition?"

"Bring him into my office," Greenbush said in a frenzy.

"But I—" Jed protested. He stopped as the guard raised the weapon once more. Jed meekly followed Greenbush back through the bank. He decided that it was a case of mistaken identity. He could call his department from the office. It would all be straightened out, with apologies.

ITH the door closed behind the two of them, Jed looked around the office. The walls were a particularly liverish and luminescent yellow-green. The desk was a block of plastic balanced precariously on one slim pedestal no bigger around then a lead pencil. The chairs gave him a dizzy feeling. They looked comfortable, but as far as he could see, they were equipped only with front legs. He could not see why they remained upright.

"Please sit there," Greenbush said. Jed lowered himself into the chair with great caution. It yielded slightly, then seemed to clasp him with an almost embarrassing warmth, as though he sat on the pneumatic lap of an exceptionally large woman.

Greenbush came over to him, pointed to Jed's wristwatch and said, "Give me that, too."

"I didn't come for a loan," Jed said.
"Don't be ass. You'll get all back."
Greenbush sat behind his desk, with
the little pile of Jed's possessions in
front of him. He made little mumbling
sounds as he prodded and poked and
pried. He seemed very interested in
the money. He listened to the watch
tick and said, "Mmm. Spring mechanical."

"No. It runs on atomic power," Jed said bitterly. Greenbush didn't answer.

From the back of Jed's wallet, Greenbush took the picture of Helen. He touched the glossy surface, said, "Twodimensional."

After what seemed an interminable period, Mr. Greenbush leaned back, put the tips of his fingers together and said, "Amberson, you are fortunate that you contacted me."

"I can visualize two schools of thought on that," Jed said stiffly.

Greenbush smiled. "You see, Amberson, I am coin collector and also antiquarian. It is possible National Museum might have material to equip you, but their stuff would be obviously old. I am reasonable man, and I know there must be explanation for all

hings." He fixed Jed with his sharp bright eyes, leaned slowly forward and said, "How did you get here?"

"Why, I walked through your front door." Jed suddenly frowned. "There was a strange jar when I did so. A dislocation, a feeling of being violently twisted in here." He tapped his temple with a thin finger.

"That's why I say you are fortunate. Some other bank might have had you in deviate ward by now where they'd be needling out slices of your frontal lobes."

"Is it too much to ask down here to get a small check cashed?"

"Not too much to ask in nineteen forty-nine, I'm sure. And I am ready to believe you are product of nineteen forty-nine. But, my dear Amberson, this is year eighty-three under Gradzinger calendar."

"For a practical joke, Greenbush, this is pretty ponderous."

Greenbush shrugged, touched a button on the desk. The wide draperies slithered slowly back from the huge window. "Walk over and take look. Amberson. Is that your world?"

Jed stood at the window. His stomach clamped into a small tight knot which slowly rose up into his throat. His eyes widened until the lids hurt. He steadied himself with his fingertips against the glass and took several deep, aching breaths. Then he turned somehow and walked, with knees that threatened to bend both ways, back to the chair. The draperies rustled back into position.

"No," Jed said weakly, "this isn't my world." He rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand, finding there a cold and faintly oily perspiration. "I had two classes this morning. I came down to look up certain documents. Everything was fine. And then I came in . . . how . . ."

Greenbush pursed his lips. "How? Who can say? I'm banker, not temporal tech. Doubtless you'd like to return to your own environment. I will signal Department of Temporal Technics at Columbia where you were employed so many years ago. . . "

"That particular phraseology, Mr. Greenbush, I find rather disturbing."

"Sorry." Greenbush stood up. "Wait here. My communicator is deranged. I'll have to use other office."

"Can't we go there? To the University?"

"I wouldn't advise it. In popular shows I've seen on subject, point of entry is always important. I rather postulate they'll assist you back through front door."

Greenbush was at the office door. Jed said, "Have—have you people sent humans back and forth in time?"

"No. They send neutrons and gravitons or something like those. Ten minutes in future or ten minutes in past. Very intricate. Enormous energy problem. Way over my head."

While Greenbush was gone, Jed methodically collected his belongings from the desk and stowed them away in his pockets. Greenbush bustled in and said, "They'll be over in half hour with necessary equipment. They think they can help you."

Half an hour. Jed said, "As long as I'm here, I wonder if I could impose? You see, I have attempted to predict certain long-range trends in monetary procedures. Your currency would be—"

"Of course, my dear fellow! Of course! Kindred interest, etcet. What would you like to know?"

"Can I see some of your currency?"
Greenbush shoved some small pellets of plastic across the desk. They were made from intricate molds. The inscription was in a sort of shorthand

English. "Those are universal, of course," Greenbush said.

Two of them were for twenty-five cents and the other for fifty cents. Jed was surprised to see so little change from the money of his own day.

"One hundred cents equals dollar, just as in your times," Greenbush said.

"Backed by gold, of course," Jed said. Greenbush gasped and then laughed. "What ludicrous idea! Any fool with public-school education has learned enough about transmutation of elements to make five tons of gold in afternoon, or of platinum or zinc or any other metal or alloy of metal you desire."

"Backed by a unit of power? An erg or something?" Jed asked with false confidence.

"With power unlimited? With all power anyone wants without charge? You're not doing any better, Amberson."

"By a unit share of national resources maybe?" Jed asked hollowly.

"National is obsolete word. There are no more nations. And world resources are limitless. We create enough for our use. There is no depletion."

"But currency, to have value must be backed by something," Jed protested. "Obviously!"

"Precious stones?"

"Children play with diamonds as big as baseballs," Greenbush said. "Speaking as economist, Amberson, why was gold used in your day?"

"It was rare, and, where obtainable, could not be obtained without a certain average fixed expenditure of man hours. Thus it wasn't really the metal itself, it was the man hours involved that was the real basis. Look, now you've got me talking in the past tense."

"And quite rightly. Now use your

head, Mr. Amberson. In world where power is free, resources are unlimited and no metal or jewel is rare, what is one constant, one user of time, one eternal fixity on which monetary system could be based?"

Jed almost forgot his situation as he labored with the problem. Finally he had an answer, and yet it seemed so incredible that he hardly dared express it. He said in a thin voice, "The creation of a human being is something that probably cannot be shortened or made easy. Is—is human life itself your basis?"

"Bravo!" Greenbush said. "One hundred cents in dollar, and five thousand dollars in HUC. That's brief for Human Unit of Currency."

"But that's slavery! That's—why, that's the height of inhumanity!"

"Don't sputter, my boy, until you know facts."

Jed laughed wildly. "If I'd made my check out for five thousand they'd have given me a—a person!"

"They'd have given you certificate entitling you to HUC. Then you could spend that certificate, you see."

"But suppose I wanted the actual person?"

"Then I suppose we could have obtained one for you from World Reserve Bank. As matter of fact, we have one in our vault now."

"In your vault!"

"Where else would we keep it? Come along. We have time."

The two armed attendants stood by while Greenbush spun the knob of the inner chamber, slid out the small box. It was of dull silver, and roughly the size of a pound box of candy. Greenbush slid back the grooved lid and Jed, shuddering, looked down through clear ice to the tiny,

naked, perfect figure of an adult male, complete even to the almost invisible wisp of hair on his chest.

"Alive?" Jed asked.

"Naturally. Pretty well suspended, of course." Greenbush slid the lid back, replaced the box in the vault and led the way back to the office.

Once again in the warm clasp of the chair, Jed asked, with a shaking voice, "Could you give me the background on—this amazing currency?"

"Nothing amazing about it. Technic advances made all too easily obtainable through lab methods except living humans. There, due to growth problems and due to —certain amount of nontechnic co-operation necessary, things could not be made easily. Full-sized ones were too unwieldy, so lab garcons worked on size till they got them down to what you see. Of course, they are never brought up to level of consciousness. They go from birth bottle to suspension chambers and are held there until adult and then refrigerated and boxed."

Greenbush broke off suddenly and said, "Are you ill?"

"No. No. I guess not."

"Well, when I first went to work for this bank, HUC was unit worth twenty thousand dollars. Then lab techs did some growth acceleration work—age acceleration, more accurate—and that brought price down and put us into rather severe inflationary period. Cup of java went up to dollar and it's stayed there ever since. So World Union stepped in and made it against law to make any more refinements in HUC production. That froze it at five thousand. Things have been stable ever since."

"Now you sound like silly Anti-HUC League. My boy, they wouldn't exist were it not for our need for currency base. They never achieve consciousness. We, in banking business, think of them just as about only manufactured item left in world which cannot be produced in afternoon. Time lag is what gives them their value. Besides, they are no longer in production, of course. Being economist, you must realize overproduction of HUC's would put us back into inflationary period."

At that moment the girl announced that the temporal techs had arrived with their equipment. Jed was led from the office out into the bank proper. The last few customers were let out as the closing hour arrived.

The men from Columbia seemed to have no interest in Jed as a human being. He said hesitantly to one, smiling shyly, "I would think you people would want to keep me here so your

historians could do research on me."

The tech gave him a look of undisguised contempt. He said, "We know all to be known about your era. Very dull period in world history."

Jed retired, abashed, and watched them set up the massive silvery coil on the inside of the bank door.

The youngest tech said quietly, "This is third time we've had to do this. You people seem to wander into sort of rhythm pattern. Very careless. We had one failure from your era. Garcon named Crater. He wandered too far from point of entry. But you ought to be all opt."

"What do I have to do?"

"Just walk through coil and out door. Adjustment is complicated. If we don't use care you might go back into your own era embedded up to your eyes in pavement. Or again, you might come out forty feet in air. Don't get unbalanced."

"I won't," Jed said fervently.

Greenbush came up and said, "Could you give me that coin you have?"

The young technician turned wearily and said, "Older, he has to leave with everything he brought and he can't take anything other with him. We've got to fit him into same vibratory rhythm. You should know that."

"It is such nice coin," Greenbush sighed.

"If I tried to take something with me?" Jed asked.

"It just wouldn't go, gesell. You would go and it would stay."

Jed thought of another question. He turned to Greenbush. "Before I go, tell me. Where are the HUC's kept?"

"In refrigerated underground vault at place called Fort Knox."

"Come on, come on, you. Just walk straight ahead through coil. Don't hurry. Push door open and go out onto street." ED STOOD, faintly dizzy, on the afternoon sidewalk of Wall Street in Manhattan. A woman bounced off him, snarled, "Fa godsake, ahya goin' uh comin!". Late papers were tossed off a truck onto the corner. Jed tiptoed over, looked cautiously and saw that the date was Tuesday, June 14th, 1949.

The further the subway took him uptown, the more the keen reality of the three quarters of an hour in the bank faded. By the time he reached his own office, sat down behind his familiar desk, it had become like a fevered dream.

Overwork. That was it. Brain fever. Probably wandered around in a daze. Better take it easy. Might fade off into a world of the imagination and never come back. Skip the book for a month. Start dating Helen again. Relax.

He grinned slowly, content with his decision. "HUC's, indeed!" he said.

Date Helen tonight. Better call her now. Suddenly he remembered that he hadn't cashed a check, and he couldn't take Helen far on a dollar.

He found the check in his pocket, glanced at it, and then found himself sitting rigid in the chair. Without taking his eyes from the check, he pulled open the desk drawer, took out the manuscript entitled, "Probable Bases of Future Monetary Systems," tore it in half and dropped it in the wastebasket.

His breath whistled in pinched nostrils. He heard, in his memory, a voice saying, "You would go and it would stay."

The check was properly made out for twenty dollars. But he had used the ink supplied by the bank. The check looked as though it had been written with a dull knife. The brown desk top showed up through the fragile lace of his signature.