

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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An Amazing Complete Novel

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By JAMES MacCREIGH

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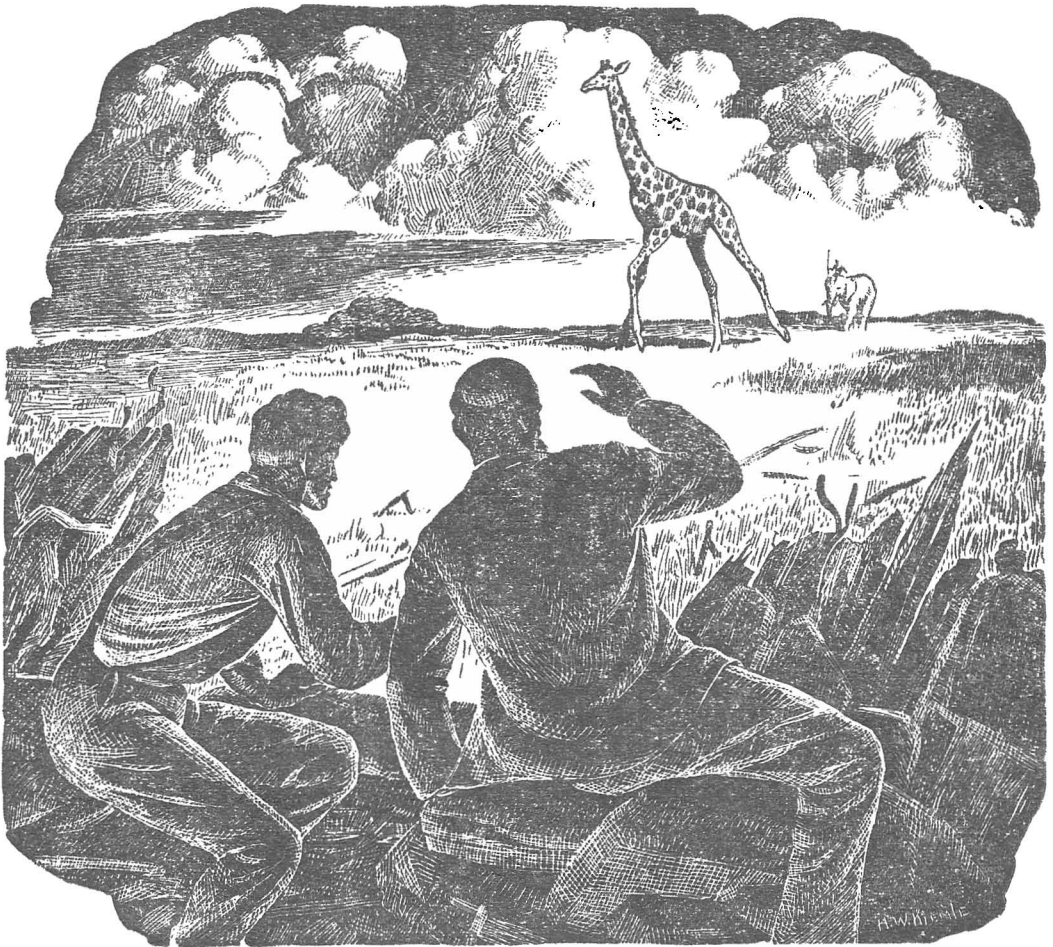
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"Oh," moaned Hank, "I wish I was safe back home"

# THE TIME TWISTER

By FRANCIS FLAGG and WEAVER WRIGHT

*Plunged into the shuddering vistas of time-space, Professor Streiff and his farmhand co-pilot receive a terrific jolt!*

**W**HILE learned in many and abstruse problems. Franklyn Streiff's title of professor was an honorary one, bestowed on him by a sometimes impressed if not always admiring public. The eccentric inventor had for many years lived on his Kansas farm with a spinster sister who did not always appreciate the colossal erudition, not to say genius, of her brother.

Kate keenly resented the time and money

he "squandered on foolish experiments." And for twenty years he had not done a lick of farm work.

"I am a scientist, not a tiller of the soil," the Professor had told his sister with proper pride. "Hire a man, if you will. Run the farm, if you want to. As for me, I ask but to be left in peace."

So Kate had hired Hank Weston, a thoughtful individual who during his years

of servitude had listened to the Professor with commendable attention.

It little became Hank, who had a vast respect for learning, to contradict the Professor's findings on any subject. But when the latter began to speculate on the unity of time and space, pointing out that it was just as possible to travel in the one as the other, Hank felt called upon to remonstrate.

"You mean to say," he questioned incredulously, "that I could go back a hundred years?"

"If you had the proper machine in which to travel, yes."

"But that'd take me back to before I was born."

The Professor smiled tolerantly.

"Look at this diagram, Hank. This line is the time continuum. It incorporates space, too. This dot is you. It doesn't matter when you were born, or when you will die: You exist right now, that's the fact. Traveling into the past or future wouldn't make you grow any younger or older. Such a thought is naïve. Let me demonstrate the mechanics of it for you. If  $NU$  equals  $TS$ , and we calculate with non-Euclidean mathematics . . ."

The Professor busily sketched and Hank stared owlshly. Finally Streiff had a blackboard that could have been submitted in a surrealists' art exhibit and Hank had an expression of incomprehension. "It don't sound reasonable," the farmhand objected. "If I went back—"

"I know," interjected the Professor, "if you went back you might meet your own father as a young man and you'd be older than he, or maybe he and your mother would be kids going to school."

"Haw, haw! That'd be funny, that would."

"Considered superficially," gritted Prof. Streiff, "such would seem to be the case; but it is impossible to say so for certain. The unpredictable action of electrons in the atom, the riddle of the nebulae and stars and human life in an exploding universe, hint that we may expect to be surprised by the vagaries of time.

"Wishing to live forever, for instance, may be as absurd as desiring to grow in size forever. That is an interesting speculation—I must make a note of it. However, the paradoxes of which you prate may exist nowhere but in your imagination. That," he declared didactically, "is what I propose to discover beyond peradventure."

Streiff became confidential in manner.

"This machine with which you have sometimes given me a helping hand through the years, Hank, and often inquired the nature of,"—he pointed to a curious contrivance occupying the center of his laboratory and workshop—"is nothing less than a pan-chronicon. A time-machine!"

Hank's face fell into the pattern employed by the people who were skeptical of the Wright Bros., of Columbus, and, a bit further back, in the unrecorded days of pre-history, the quasi-humans who questioned the pantomime of Brut, the caveman, when he indicated that the flint he would strike on rock would make a wood-eating flower blossom.

"You're joking, Professor," he suggested.

"Joking! I was never more serious in my life. Another week and it will be ready. Then, Hank, then"—his long face took on a look of triumph—"I shall prove that which will make me greater than Newton and Einstein, a more marvelous explorer than Columbus or Byrd. Why, they won't be in it with me at all. And *you*, my friend, can say you knew me intimately, can boast of my acquaintance. Ah, Hank, how proud of me you will be then. How this flouting countryside will honor its famous citizen!"

**N**OW Hank Weston was not a complete fool. But after all, despite his sagelike reflections and desultory readings (mostly in magazine sections of Sunday papers where marvelous feats of science are often set forth with dramatic illustrations), he was a simple sort who had lived his days in rural surroundings. He knew enough to suspect that there were thousands of strange things he didn't know. Therefore the professor found him a receptive audience.

As Hank watched the queer machine take shape, as he even helped give the finishing touches to its construction, the sight of the machinery, the monologues of the enthusiastic Streiff, the dynamic dream of time-travel, exerted over him a mesmeric influence. Kate Streiff was caustic about his absent-mindedness.

"Don't forget you're hired to do farm work," she said bitingly, "and not to listen to that crazy brother of mine. Hank Weston, if I catch you sneaking into his workshop again, when you oughtta be hoeing corn, offa this farm you go!"

Yes," said Hank, meekly, but the Professor's laboratory and oratory were twin magnets that drew his iron will and melted it

down. So one windy summer's afternoon he crept away from the heat and his haying to visit the forbidden barn.

He found the Professor in a fever of elation.

"Hank, you are just in time! Look—it's finished!"

Hank eyed "it" doubtfully. It was the strangest contraption he had ever seen. Not even the Sunday supplements had ever dished up an odder illustration. Partly it resembled a top, and then again one could trace a corkscrew likeness in its shaft. Two cushioned seats set astride brief horsebacks, saddle-wise.

"Will it work?" Hank asked hoarsely.

"Work?" barked the Professor. "Of course it will work!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I've experimented with the cat. I'll show you."

He picked up a spitting feline and secured it to one of the seats.

"I deflect this lever, so," he said, standing back.

Hank's eyes nearly parted company with their sockets as he watched the result. The toplike contrivance spun, and as it spun the corkscrew shaft wove in and out in a most bewildering fashion. As the speed increased, the machine became a blur in which nothing substantial was discernible. Indeed, whether owing to the camouflaged lines and angles of its construction or otherwise, one might well be forgiven for imagining that cat and machine had disappeared.

After a minute, the Professor once more manipulated the lever and the bizarre mechanism with its load gradually came back into visibility and ceased rotating. An unhappy cat hung limply on the seat, mewing melancholically.

"You see!" said Streiff triumphantly.

"Huh?" grunted his undecided acolyte.

"She went over all right," crowed the Professor.

"Over where?"

"Into the future, of course!"

"You mean—the cat—went ahead—in time?"

"Didn't you see what happened with your own eyes?" the Professor snapped.

"Yeah," faltered the farm-hand, "but are you sure?"

"Certain! Where else could it have gone? And now," he added excitedly, "it only remains for us to undertake the trip."

"Us!" Hank's head resembled a revolving door. "Nossir, not me, Professor! I'm not risking my life in no contraption like that. It ain't safe."

"Safe? Why of course it's safe!"

"How do you know?"

"Didn't the cat come back all right?"

"Well, I'm no cat."

Prof. Streiff regarded Hank severely.

"Hank, it can't be that you're afraid. My dear friend, what cowardly weakness is this? Consider Columbus, Magellan, Perry, Byrd. Did they feel fear? Perhaps, but they conquered such unmanly symptoms. In that lay their greatness. Strength of character, Hank. They had strength of character, and their names are immortal. Your name too can be immortal!"

"Think of it, Hank: Posterity will inscribe it in its annals along with those of Pasteur, Darwin, Koch, Madame Curie. Hank Weston, copilot with Professor Franklyn Leonard Streiff, of the first time-machine ever invented! That's the way it'll read under your portrait in the pantheon of fame. Can you forego such a chance? No! Opportunity knocks but once."

The professor produced from a locker a flask of amber fluid.

"Here, drink of this." He poured out two generous tumblers full. "A toast to our coming flight! Down it, man! Ah, that puts the sparkle in the eyes and the stout courage in the heart. Have another. Hank, this day will go ringing down the corridors of time. Finish the bottle, my friend. Now take your seat there. Yes, there—your feet in the stirrups. I seat myself beside you. What's that?"

A shrill feminine voice was heard calling loudly,

"Franklyn! Franklyn!"

"Ssh-sh," admonished the Professor. "Keep still, it's Kate—always sticking her nose in where it isn't wanted."

A rush of steps came along the passageway, fists banged at the bolted door.

"Frank! Hank! Are you there?"

"Don't speak, on your life," breathed the Professor.

Hank had no intention of speaking.

"Oh," cried Kate frustratedly, "where can they be!"

They heard, in rhythm with their pumping hearts, her feet pound down the stairs. From a distance the sound of her voice came back, still shouting, "Franklyn! Hank!"

The Professor shook his head.

"She is, I should judge, vastly excited over something. Quite unseemly of her. Ah me, how many times I've tried to reason with that woman. Poise, Hank, poise. Cultivate it as a flower, my friend. And now, we are ready at last—ready to flee the petty irritations of the moment. Your feet are secure, your hands are gripping the bars? O, glorious moment!" And he knifed the lever.

**T**HE time-machine gave a wild lurch—like a merry-go-round gone mad it spun. What the Professor expected is hard to say, but whatever it was, crystallized reality surpassed it. With a sudden roar of thunder the whole world turned black, existence split asunder.

He and Hank were pathetic straws that a mighty wind buffeted, beat. There was a rending and a tearing, a howling fury of tortured air surrounded and sought to destroy them. They and the machine seemed whirling down the everlasting vistas of space.

Then with a sickening swoop and a terrible jolt, their journey ceased. Consciousness, too, came to an end. . . .

"Professor! Oh, Professor!"

To the thin wail of Hank's voice Streiff came back to life and reason. His mouth was full of dust, his body full of aches, his head a throbbing pain. Yet miraculously he was alive.

From a clear sky the sun shone torridly. The Professor blinked painfully, sat up, regarded the scene about him ruefully. He groaned.

The garret was gone; the farmhouse and farm buildings had also disappeared. Some twenty feet away lay what was left of the time-machine, a twisted mass of metal and plastic. A row of young cotton trees was missing. Not far off an old foundation showed where a house once might have stood. Change, change—everything was unmistakably changed. Despite his aches and bruises, Franklyn Leonard Streiff, first time-traveler, surged to his feet. There could be no doubt about it—this was the future!

"Victory, Hank! Victory!" he cried. "My machine was a perfect success. We have traveled in time!"

Hank stared at him without enthusiasm.

"I think," he said woefully, "that my neck is broken."

"Nonsense, nothing of the sort. Stand up and let me look you over. How could your

neck be broken when you can twist it so? Ah, Hank, I'm afraid you lack the spirit of a true explorer and scientist. Forget your minor aches, man, and realize the stupendousness of the thing we have done. As far as I can calculate, we have journeyed some hundred odd years into the future."

"And how," demanded Hank practically, "are we going to get back?"

The Professor stared perplexedly at the scrapped machine, strewn unceremoniously on the sands of time.

"By heaven," he confessed, "I hadn't thought of that!" After a moment he brightened. "But we may not *want* to return, had you thought of that? But everything in its place. The people of the 21st Century are undoubtedly skilled mechanics, and could reconstruct the panchronicon from my instructions. Ah, Hank, what marvelous advances science and invention must have made in a century! Time enough for mankind to have united peacefully into a Wellsian Egalitarian World. *Kredeble, la mondo paca parolas Esperanton—semantike korektita.*"

"Huh?" Hank ejaculated at the latter. "Is that Spanish or Latin, Professor?"

"Neither, Hank. You remember the artificial language I learned in my youth. *Esperanto*. I said it is credible that the peaceful world will now be speaking the scientifically synthesized auxiliary tongue, the symbology of its vocabulary having been corrected semantically, of course."

"Oh. And atomic power and rocket ships to—" Hank started to speculate, but interrupted himself with a yell.

"My God, look! What's that?"

The Professor stared.

Loping across country with prodigious leaps, spindle legs flashing, small head set at the end of an enormously long and thin neck which raised it some fifteen feet from the ground, was the most bizarre-looking creature imaginable. It passed, and in seeming pursuit lumbered a colossus of a beast bearing on its leathery back a dark-skinned man in a breech-clout. The rider brandished a long spear and shouted wild and unintelligible words.

The two wrecked time-travelers goggled. A giraffe in Kansas! And being hunted by a barbarian on an elephant! The combination was too utterly fantastic and incredible.

"Oh," moaned Hank, "I wish I was safe back home."

They made themselves as inconspicuous as

possible. Conspicuity under the circumstances would have been inviting catastrophe, they felt.

A dozen zebras whirled by; and after them, on gaily caparisoned horses, came a band of copper-colored hunters, stripped to the waist, long hair floating loose, wearing fringed trousers and leggings.

The hunters yelled, and urged their mounts to greater speed.

"Really," said Prof. Streiff, scratching his nose, "really, the people of the future appear to have odd habits! I wonder if I didn't deflect the switch a trifle too hard and go into the past? Or perhaps the Asiatics have somehow overthrown America. Elephants and giraffes on Kansas plains might be explained by—"

The growl which interrupted his theorizing was explained by a huge Numidian lion which he turned to find regarding him with a meditative look from a scant ten yards' distance. Hank saw the king of beasts a second later.

**A**S THE pair stared, horror-stricken, the tawny cat opened its cavernous mouth and again there issued from it a rumbling roar. It is only fair to record that the Professor's foot slipped, otherwise he would have beaten Hank on the getaway by three seconds flat. As it was, despite his wrenched knee, he was neck and neck with his copilot when they dived over a section of the foundation on which a house had once stood.

Had either glanced back they would have seen the lion, like a big puzzled persian, squatting on its haunches and following their flight with inquisitive eyes. But they had no time to glance back. All energies and faculties were concentrated on finding a two-man hole with no room for a lion.

And miraculously enough the hole presented itself for their accommodation. A

section of cellar wall swung outward disclosing a dark burrow into which they unanimously flung themselves, almost bowling over as they did so the person who had opened the door.

"Shut it quick!" screamed the Professor, "there's a savage lion outside!"

The door shut with a bang.

"Land's sakes," complained a woman's high-pitched querulous voice, a voice inexplicably familiar to both their ears, "so here you are at last."

On his hands and knees in the gloom, breathless from his headlong flight, Kate Streiff's bewildered brother babbled, "What year is this?"

"What year! Well, I always said, Franklyn, you weren't quite right, and now I know it! What's more, you're making as big a dumb idiot outta Hank Weston.

"When I heard the radio warning about the tornado and saw we was right in the path of that twister, I tried to warn you two to git in the storm-cellar. Hammered on your door, I did, but I guess you were gallivantin' round, or," with a suspicious sniff, "out boozing. Pity you weren't killed, the both of you!"

With a groan of disillusionment the Professor buried his head in his arms. They hadn't traveled in time after all. He and Hank were still in 1947, and—a cyclone had devastated the farm! Oh, it couldn't be true, all his high hopes dashed like this. In one last feeble attempt to save the situation he pleaded, "But the lion, the elephant, the giraffe and zebras—where did they all come from?"

"I guess," said Kate, "the twister must have struck Lao Bros. Circus that was showing over at Edgeville, and some of the animals got loose."

The strangling noises from his throat that Prof. Streiff tried to suppress in the darkness were despairingly animalistic in nature.