

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE.

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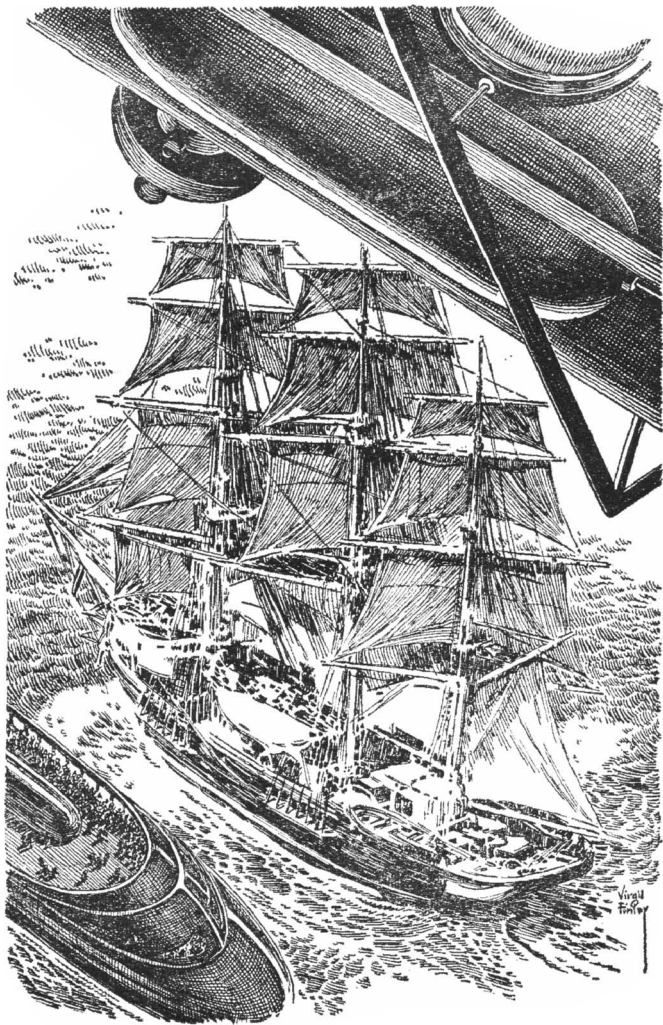
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by GEORGE O. SMITH

TIME FOR SURVIVAL

THE STORM ruined my plan.

Not by seasickness. I'd come prepared for the worst, knowing how rough it could get on a sailing ship of the Nineteenth Century. I outrode the storm easily, stowed away in the hold. Not even the breakage of some of the 1700 barrels of alcohol carried as a cargo bothered me although the stench was terrific.

But on the morning of 25 November 1872, the first mate, Albert Richardson sent the second mate, Andrew Gilling below with two of the German seamen to assay the storm damage. They found me and I was hauled aloft before Captain Briggs as a stow-away.

Captain Briggs of the *Mary Celeste* eyed my strange clothing with deep curiosity, but his interest was obviously more concerned with my unauthorized presence. He said sternly, "When did you get aboard?"

I realized that I had to impress him. I smiled. "You delayed your sailing from the Fifth November to the

Sixth so that you and Mrs. Briggs could have dinner aboard *Die Gratia* with Captain Morehouse," I said.

"How can you know so much?" he exclaimed. "How can you live as a stowaway for almost twenty days?"

I held up my chronithon contactor, knowing that now I could impress him indeed. "Captain Briggs," I said. "I am a time-travelling historian from the Twenty-Second Century." I pointed to the big red button on the top. "Until I depress this button and return to my own day and age, every morning I receive my daily ration of food and water. It's about—"

I'd timed it close. I was interrupted by the click of the chronithon as it time-transferred my daily ration. I opened the cabinet and offered a bite of twenty-second century breakfast to the captain.

He said, "This is a sailor's tall tale, I think. You claim that you're a time-travelling historian? Then tell me, why are you here on *Mary Celeste*?"

"Captain Briggs," I said, "the Time

Machine was invented in Nineteen Eighty-Seven. Within twenty years every historical event had been painstakingly researched and authentically written—re-written—by time-travelling historians who viewed the event as partaking eye-witnesses. By my time, fame and fortune awaits any man who has the luck and dogged determination to scour historic time to locate some event that has not been recounted faithfully to the last niggling little detail. Why, Captain Briggs, in Jim Bishop's famous 'The Day Columbus Landed' they record the name of the man who owned the hen that laid the egg that Columbus stood on end to impress Isabella with his ability. And so, Captain Briggs, I stowed away because I—"

A woman's voice interrupted me, I turned to look at the captain's wife who, of course, was the only woman aboard *Mary Celeste*. She was carrying little Sophia Matilda in her arms. She said, "Edward, what uncouthly manner of ship is that?"

The steward, Edward Head replied, "I don't rightly know, ma'am."

I turned to look. No more than fifty feet from the starboard rail was a vast barge. Upon the barge were serried rows of seats that stretched upwards and backwards for hundreds of feet. The seats were filling rapidly; ushers were escorting the spectators efficiently, vendors were selling refreshments and programs. A thrumming sound came from overhead and I looked up to watch the materialization of jetcopters and personnel carriers and even a poised spacecraft hanging in a dome above our heads.

Over the lee rail came a crew of technicians carrying the heavy Ward-Workman tridi recorders of the twenty-seventh century, and their director pulled a script from his pocket and said:

"Joe, you and Pete dislocate the binnacle and break the compass. Al, open the fore hatch and lazarette. Tony, that spring-wound chronom-

eter is a pre-atomic clock and worth a fortune to the National Museum, put it among my personal loot, along with the sextant. You can keep the ship's register, but give the navigation books to George with my compliments. Let's see, um. Sails, jib and fore-topmast. Now toss the yawl overboard; get it out of the way. It's missing." One of his men came up and said something to him that I could not hear. "No," he replied, "It would not be more dramatic to dummy-up a half-eaten breakfast and a pan of milk warming on the stove for the baby. Too many writers tried to make it that way in the beginning. I know what's authentic."

Then he paused as the Ward-Workman cameramen panned around *Mary Celeste* making close-up and approach shots. One by one they finished their work and reported to him.

"Fine," he said, looking at his strapwatch. "Now let's back off for some long shots. And remember, we don't know what kind of a catastrophe this is going to be, so keep those tridi recorders running constantly until I tell you to stop!"

Captain Benjamin Spooner Briggs of *Mary Celeste* put an arm around his wife. To me he said, "I don't completely understand, but I do get enough to realize that we're the subject of something evil."

"Yes," I replied, "you—"

"We're not waiting here to let it happen to us!" he snapped.

"But you can't change history!" I objected.

"Watch," he said roughly. And then with a stentorian voice, Captain Briggs roared: "*Abandon ship!*"

The captain and his wife, still carrying their daughter Sophia Matilda, mingled with the photorecording crew. The two mates, the steward, and the four German seamen went over the side and swam swiftly for the barges. There were flurries of activity when they went aboard the

barges, but then the activity stilled and I was alone on *Mary Celeste*.

I looked around me and realized that Captain Briggs hadn't changed history. He'd made it!

Slowly the barges emptied, the spectators returned to their own time and place among the Centuries. Sorrowfully I pressed my button and went home. My fame would never be, my fortune would never start. My book would remain unwritten, for I knew full well that potential customer for this historic event had been here as an eye witness. After seeing it, who'd bother to buy my book?

On 4 December, 1872, Captain Morehouse of *Die Gratia* sighted *Mary Celeste* yawing in a mild sea with jib and fore-topmast sails set, no one at the helm and no one aboard. The binnacle was knocked out of place, the compass was broken. The sextant, the chronometer, ship's register and navigation books were missing. The ship's yawl, lashed to the

main hatch was missing. The fore hatch and lazarette were open and about a dozen of the ship's cargo of 1701 barrels of alcohol were broken or leaking badly.

The last notation in the ship's deck log had been made early in the morning of 25 November 1872, and the account of the previous hours indicated that *Mary Celeste* had come through a severe storm on the previous day and most of the night.

Accounts that include half-eaten plates of food, half-packed bags and other evidences of an abrupt interruption and panicky flight for safety are false.

No survivors have ever turned up, no explanation can be given. Researchers in the "Mystery of *Mary Celeste*" suggest that the storm, the leaking alcohol, combined to frighten Captain Briggs with a threat of fire or explosion and that they all took off in the ship's yawl, which floundered.

We will not know the truth until someone invents the Time Machine.