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SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

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*Cover by Milton Luros, from "The World She Wanted!"
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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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TIME GOES TO NOW

(illustrated by Milton Luross)

Anything in that junk-pile could be used for building the aquarium in his basement, Henry Quiby thought. Even those two objects resembling metal diving-suits. But henpecked Henry never suspected how he'd use one of those suits . . .

By CHARLES DYE



JOE HOOLAGAN stood picking his teeth underneath the big, sloppy sign proclaiming: *JOE'S JUNK YARD The Best Junk In Town.* Contemptuously, he watched Henry Quigy, lunchpail in hand, shamble stoop-shouldered into the yard. "Whatcha say, professor?" Joe said, flicking away his toothpick.

"Good morning, er—Joe," said Quigby shyly. He wasn't really a professor. Because of economic difficulties—he told himself—he had never become anything more than a high-school teacher in history. It secretly irritated him every time Joe sarcastically called him "professor"; but he was afraid to say something, for fear of raising Joe's temper.

"Gotta load of stuff in yesterday from that boiler factory. Wanna take a look?"

"By all means," Quigby said, following Joe into the rear of the yard. He was led down a narrow pathway that wound in and out between mountainous piles of wrecked autos, a few planes, old bathtubs, sinks, rusty plumbing, and practically anything nameable that was porcelain or metal—and broken. They finally came out into a vacant space where all new acquisitions were dumped for classification before being stacked back in the yard.

"Over there," said Joe pointing.

Yes, thought Quigby, walking over to the pile of iron-plate, dismantled boiler parts, and pipe, *this would be just the thing!* He also noticed two objects resembling metal diving suits sticking out of the pile, but he didn't say anything; Joe might not know they were there. He would be able to use almost everything in the pile for that basement aquarium he was going to build. Of course, Harriet didn't know he was going to build it. But then, hadn't she said he could do anything with his half of his uncle's inheritance money?

"I'll take it—the whole pile!" said Quigby enthusiastically. "Uh—how much?"

"Well, let's see," Joe said, pretending he didn't already know how much he was going to stick old Quigby. "It'll take me and the boys a couple of hours to get this stuff loaded back on the truck and over to your place. Then we gotta unload it. Then there's all the time it took hauling it in from that boiler dump." Joe looked sharp-

ly at Quigby. "Seventy-five bucks."

"All right," Quigby said, drawing out his check book.

"We'll have it over to your place before noon," Joe said, feeling awfully superior, now that he'd gotten away with gypping Quigby once more.

"Fine," Quigby said. "On second thought, er—ah, could you make it this afternoon and put the stuff in the basement?" Harriet would be out then, attending one of her endless club meetings. It was better she didn't see his latest acquisition; she would only start hollering about how foolish and silly he was, wasting his money on plain junk.

"Sure boss," Joe said sarcastically, pulling out an old cigar butt from his shirt pocket and lighting it.



Late that afternoon, Henry Quigby, clutching his lunch pail and a book on marine life by Beebe, trudged wearily up his front-porch steps.

Today had gone worse than usual. He'd been late to his first class; some body had emptied his thermos of tea and substituted brandy. During the afternoon—possibly because it was Friday—his students had been more unruly than ever—spit wads and rubber bands plopping and zinging around the room like gunfire. By the time the dismissal bell rang, all he could do was lean against his desk and gasp.

Henry had no sooner set foot inside his house, than a loud feminine voice yelled, "Henry Quigby—come in here!"

The devil! thought Henry, crossing into the bedroom. *Hadn't Harriet gone to her club meeting after all?* "Yes, dear," he said meekly.

"Mrs. Sykes phoned this noon to say the league meeting was canceled; and I came down with a splitting headache arguing with that horrible woman over whether or not, just because she's chairman, *she* has the right to cancel a meeting anytime *she*

feels like it. Then those wretched junk men came clattering and stomping into the basement—”

“I’m sorry they disturbed you, dear.”

“—with seventy-five dollars worth of junk they said *you* bought!”

“But Harriet, with that seventy-five dollars worth of junk, I can build that aquarium I’ve been talking about all these years for half the price it would cost otherwise. I’m going to—”

“Well, you can’t build it now. Starting tomorrow, the City Sewing Circle will be meeting three times weekly in the basement. We certainly don’t want any smelly aquarium cluttering up the place.”

“But Harriet!”

“No buts; get that stuff out of there. Pile it against the garage or someplace. Now you’ve made my head worse! I won’t be able to get supper—besides, I don’t want any.”

Without a word, Henry turned and walked out of the house. Still clutching his Beebe and lunch-pail, he trudged down the steps into the basement. Flicking the light switch, he gazed sadly at his junk. The two diving-suits, or whatever they were, gleamed dully on top of the pile.

FOR A LONG time he stood there—despising himself, and trying to understand why he was the way he was. Why couldn’t he be dictatorial like Harriet? People always seemed respectful of wilful, selfish individuals—goodness knows *he* was always being respectful enough. If he only had the courage to stomp upstairs and, for once in his life, shake his fist in Harriet’s face and tell her this was *his* house and *his* basement. He would do whatever he liked with it, and she and her damned sewing circle of gossip women could go out in the vacant lot!

Suddenly he remembered his lunch thermos, still full of brandy. That was it; he’d get drunk! So what if it *did* only give him false courage? He would still do what he’d always want-

ed to do: tell her that from now on he was doing all the dictating, and it would stay that way, and if she didn’t like it—well, she could always go back to her mother!

Opening his lunch pail, and unscrewing the thermos cap, Henry took a long swig. The taste of the stuff nauseated him, but after several more swallows, he forgot all about the taste. He began to feel quick and sharp, like a razor. Then, his dancing eyes lit upon the diving-suits half-buried in the pile of junk. Wouldn’t it be fun to get inside one of those and go tip-toeing upstairs into Harriet’s bedroom—and scare her! Yes, like she made him jump every morning by yelling into his ear to get out of bed.

Suppressing a chuckle, Henry dragged the two suits out of the pile. One, he plainly saw, was damaged—the legs and transparent head-piece smashed. The other, with the exception of a few dents and scratches, seemed to be undamaged. Then Henry noticed neither suit had arms. Odd, he thought, but he shrugged it off with another shot of brandy from the thermos.

First, before getting into the suit, he’d have to prop open the back-porch screen. Removing his shoes, he quietly tip-toed up, propping it open at the bottom with a three-foot stick of wood. This should allow him enough room to step through once he was inside the suit. Going back to the basement, he replaced his shoes, and pulled out some old cotton waste from the rag box to muffle the metal soles of the diving suit.

When that task was completed, and he’d had another swig of brandy, he was all set to don the suit. Then he began realizing its strangeness of design. It was all one piece, from the transparent head-dome to the now-padded metal foot-soles. He noticed a small, pinkish button on the left side of the breast-plate. He pressed it; the front portion of the suit clicked open. On the inside of the breast-plate was a

small control panel. In its center was a calibrated dial of some sort or other—probably to register the depth of the dive, thought Henry. To the left was a small lever protruding four or five inches. To the right, a large, red button. Clamped to the panel, beneath the dial, was a strange-looking gadget or weapon, resembling a Buck Rogers pistol. The rest of the suit was padded with what looked like sponge-rubber.

Chuckling and hiccupping simultaneously, Henry tried to imagine the look of fright on Harriet's face when he lunged into her room. Standing the suit up against the wall, he backed into the rear half; then, grasping the bottom of the control panel, he slammed the front portion shut.

Suddenly his head began to reel and a slight wave of nausea passed over him. He vaguely realized he'd better get his little joke over with, before he was unable to stand up.

Going slowly and carefully, he made it up the basement stairs without too much difficulty. This gave him confidence—too much confidence. When he started climbing the back-porch stairs, he went too fast and tripped over the third step. Feeling himself falling forward, he instinctively raised his hands inside the suit to protect his face. As he did so, his left hand caught and flicked the small lever on the left side of the control panel—

●

THE NEXT thing Henry Quigby knew, he was thousands of feet up in the night sky. Except for his reeling head, he suddenly felt cold sober. His thoughts churned round and round, frantically trying to rationalize his unbelievable predicament.

The cold stars, all around him, glittered mockingly.

He noticed a faint hum and warmth at his back. Twisting his head inside the head-piece, he saw wisps of blue flame or light emanating from an almost invisible nozzle at the back of the suit.

Good Lord, he thought, *this isn't a diving suit after all, but some sort of flying suit!* How high was he? He couldn't make heads or tails of the dial, which was calibrated in strange geometric symbols. The needle was pointing straight up, in the same position he'd noticed it back in the basement.

Glancing down toward earth, Henry suddenly grew panicky. What if he was stuck up here? He would maybe slowly freeze or suffocate!

Again, and again, he frantically flicked the lever protruding from the panel. Nothing happened. Noticing the dial had no covering, he moved the needle backwards, then forwards, then backwards. Again nothing happened. The large, red button was his last resort.

He pushed the button.

This time something happened! He lost consciousness . . .

●

Some sharp object sticking up into his chest was his first rude awakening into awareness. With a groan, he managed to roll over on his back. As he did so, there was a sharp click; he realized he'd been lying chest-down on the control board lever. What control board lever?

It was only then that he became fully conscious of his surroundings. He was still inside this damned diving-suit. Glancing up through the transparent head-piece, he saw that it was still night.

His head! Somebody seemed to be trying to crack it with a sledgehammer! And his mouth tasted as though somebody else had slept in it all night. He closed his eyes, keeping them tightly shut. What had happened?

Oh yes, he'd gotten drunk—but no, it had started before that . . . at Joe's junk yard. He'd bought that pile of boiler factory stuff containing the two diving suits. Then Harriet had forbidden him to build the aquarium—

It all came back to him! Lord, what an ass he'd made of himself—getting drunk, putting on this suit to scare Harriet. He must have fallen down the back-porch steps and, while unconscious, dreamed he'd been shot up into the sky. While here he'd been all the time—lying in his own backyard!

OPENING his eyes, Henry glanced at the faintly glowing dial of his wrist-watch. It was after midnight; he'd better get out of this suit and cart the rest of the junk out of the basement before Harriet caused any more unpleasantness. Searching, he found the inside half of the button he'd pushed to open the suit. He pressed it, and the front half of the suit flew open. Tottering, he stood up—

To face a snarling, fiery-eyed monster, crouching hardly ten feet away! For several deadly seconds, Henry stared hypnotized at the frightful thing outlined against the stars. Then suddenly, his shock turned to fright! Turning to flee, he slipped, falling across the control panel of the open suit. He heard another snarl, and out of the corner of his eye saw the beast getting ready to pounce!

Now he was done for! Then his hand came in contact with the gun-like object clamped to the control panel. Frantically he jerked it loose and pointed it at the monster, squeezing the trigger.

Nothing happened! The thing would spring any minute! Again and again he squeezed the trigger. Not a sound. The gun was either broken or out of ammunition. Cringing, Henry waited for the spring—

But it didn't come, nor was there a sound from the beast. Henry looked at the gun still clasped in his shaking hand. Did it have some sort of silencer, or did it work on a completely new principle?

Screwing up his courage, he cautiously stood up and walked over to the crouching monster. There seemed to be no sign of life left in it. Clutching

the gun tightly, he gave the beast a nudge with his foot. It toppled over, still in its crouching position, and lay on its side. Henry again looked at the gun! It must kill by somehow paralyzing its victim. Bending over to get a better look at his kill, he was startled to find it was a huge striped tiger! What was a tiger doing in his backyard? There weren't any circuses in town that he knew of.

Then, for the first time since all the excitement, Henry looked around for his backyard.

It wasn't there.

Nothing was there. His house, his garden, his garage, other neighboring houses. He was in a grassy clearing, surrounded on three sides by towering jungle. Straight ahead, he caught the faint glimmer of water.

Was he still drunk? Was he having a nightmare? Was—was he insane?

Wildly, Henry glanced down at the tiger lying at his feet. Kneeling, he touched the beast with his hands. It was solid enough. Then he noticed its jaws and fangs—it was a saber-tooth! Henry was thunderstruck; they were supposed to have existed only in prehistoric times.

All of this was too much for Henry—plus the unexplainable, the horrible fear of the unknown. Sobbing hysterically and tightly clutching the gun, he ran stumbling down the clearing towards the glimmer of water. His throat became a burning hole, as he plowed through marshy soil surrounding the body of water.

THEN, WITH a hideous sucking and snorting noise, a gargantuan nightmare-shape loomed up directly in front of him! An overpowering stench of rotting garbage momentarily brought Henry to his senses. Bringing up the gun and squeezing the trigger, he turned, fleeing towards the inky blot of jungle—not daring to glance back at the horror which had almost gobbled him up!

The marsh sucked and clung to his feet like solidifying molasses. Surely

this must be a nightmare; for as in a nightmare, the faster he tried to run the slower he seemed to go!

Finally, he reached solid ground. Staggering across this, he noticed one of his shoes was missing. For a moment he hesitated, deciding whether to look for it; that moment almost cost him his life!

A long, black, almost invisible, reptilian creature darted out from behind a clump of bushes and streaked straight for Henry's legs.

This is the end! thought Henry, shutting his eyes. As he did so, a sudden spell of dizziness overcame him, causing his shoeless foot to skid from under him. The slip saved him; hissing, the reptile went shooting between his spread-eagled legs so fast that its momentum carried it yards into the blackness beyond.

Now sprawled on the ground, Henry pointed his gun in the direction of the fast returning hissing. Holding back the trigger, he sprayed the whole area into which the snake, or whatever it was, had disappeared.

After several minutes of this, Henry got to his feet and stumbled the remaining distance to the jungle edge: suddenly not caring whether his peculiar pistol had killed the snake or not.

With utter exhaustion upon him, and no energy left to generate fear, calmness and reason slowly returned. He realized he'd better muster up one last ounce of strength and climb one of the giant fern-trees for the night, before any more harm had a chance to befall him.

His muscles felt as stiff and as brittle as matchsticks, as, hand over hand, he went up the nearest and tallest tree. Remembering how he'd once seen Tarzan do it in a movie, he made fairly good progress in spite of his exhaustion. Once or twice, he was almost trapped as an arm or leg became caught in the mesh-like foliage of ropey vines.

Finally, when he thought he'd climbed high enough to be out of danger, he tied the stoutest vine he could

find around his chest—in case he fell off the yard-wide limb while asleep.

After making himself as comfortable as he could, and making sure his weapon was safely tucked away, he wearily closed his eyes and listened to the weird night-noises of this other planet or prehistoric world he'd been thrust into. He was too tired to ponder over how he'd gotten here, or how he was going to get out. But before he dropped into dreamless sleep, he was certain of one thing: the adventures of the past few hours had somehow changed him. He'd run up against situations far more deadly than anything his own world had ever offered him—and he'd managed to solve them, one way or another. Something he'd never quite done in his world.

He didn't blame the kids at school for being contemptuous of him—or, for that matter, Harriet. What had there been likable about him? Never standing up or fighting for his convictions, letting Harriet push and brow-beat him. Why should anyone have respected him? Somehow he'd get out of this fantastic mess—if he didn't die trying—and go back and show them all what sort of a person he could and would be! Harriet and the others weren't really unlikable people; he'd just allowed them to take advantage of his weaknesses. Well, if he got out of this, he certainly wouldn't be weak any more!

For the first time in his life, Henry Quigby felt like a man. Then, clouds of sleepy exhaustion slowly darkened his consciousness.



A HOT, STEAMY dawn brought the nightmarish world suddenly and violently to life! Strange cries and blood-curdling howls blended discordantly with the buzzing chatter of giant insects. Henry awoke with such a start that for a moment he felt a sickening sense of displacement; then, the pieces of his consciousness began dropping into place. And the reality of his pre-

dicament became vividly clear in the dirty, gray light of the prehistoric dawn. He *must* be either in prehistoric times, or in some corner of the world forgotten by time; otherwise, how account for the saber-tooth tiger? He doubted if the environment of another planet could produce such an exact replica of a saber-tooth.

Untying the vine from around his chest, he stood up on his perch and attempted to survey the terrain. Directly in front of him, covered by fog, was the grassy clearing of last night's adventures. To the left was the marsh, completely hidden in steamy vapors and snakey streamers of mist. On all sides of the clearing, riotous jungle towered hundreds of feet into the star-flecked dawn sky.

He looked up at the pale stars and some of his loneliness vanished as he recognized the Pole Star and the Big Dipper. Suddenly, things didn't seem so hopeless after all. There must be some way out? There had certainly been a way in, and as soon as he'd fully figured that out—

Pangs of thirst and hunger brought him back to the immediate problems of the present. He decided to wait until it was fully light before attempting to do anything about his stomach. In the meantime, he would relax on his perch and try to figure a few things out.

It all seemed to have started with that pile of junk containing what he thought were diving suits. Where did Joe say the stuff had come from? The boiler factory, that was it. And hadn't something happened there? Then he remembered all the details. A mysterious missile one night had smashed into the factory, demolishing it completely. The newspapers had made a big to-do, claiming it was everything from the Russians to crackpot inventors. Army men had investigated the wreckage, later hauling away some of the debris. Nothing had been said about what they'd found—if anything.

But where could the diving suits, or

flying suits, or whatever they were, have come from? What would a boiler factory be doing making suits such as the one he'd landed here in? The thought of the mysterious missile reminded him of a book he'd once read titled *LO!* by somebody named Fort. As he recalled, Fort had suggested that many of the unexplained disappearances, explosions, and accidents might be caused directly or indirectly by some outside superior force man wasn't even aware of. Suppose the missile that had hit the boiler factory had come from some outside source—the Martians, perhaps?

Somehow, in the light of his present situation, the idea didn't sound too fantastic. They could have been carrying the suits he'd gotten hold of when they met with the accident. Henry by now realized that the suits—at least the one he'd come here in—were devices for some sort of time-travel. But why had the suit shot him up into the sky? Unless this was to prevent the traveler from materializing in the middle of an unforeseen mountain or building at the end of his journey. Then, of course, once the trip was completed high in the air, the traveler was automatically lowered to the ground.

Henry's heart began to beat faster. Barring accidents, it was possible that getting out of here would be just as easy as his unintentional arrival.

THE SUN suddenly blazed into view like a giant red eye, causing the jungle, as far as Henry could see, to resemble shimmering green fire. The fog covering the clearing was disintegrating into puffy clots, which slowly evaporated into the furnace-like heat of the day.

Henry began feeling apprehensive about the time suit. It had been weak and foolish of him to become hysterical and run off, leaving the suit open all night unprotected. Suppose something had happened to it? Then there would be no getting back—ever! It would all be so simple if he could

just saunter over when the fog lifted, climb inside, flick the ascent lever, set the dial needle to where it was before he started experimenting, and push the red button—

In spite of the breaking fog, Henry still couldn't see the suit. He decided to climb down from his roost and locate it as soon as possible.

Getting down from the giant fern-tree proved harder than climbing it had. As he neared the bottom, he increasingly became entangled in the snake-like vines and creepers weaving in and out of the tree like a spider's web. Finally, fifteen feet from the ground, he spotted a hole in the net-like foliage and jumped the remaining distance.

He had no sooner gotten to his feet, than a terrific commotion from across the clearing attracted his attention.

Through the wisps and clots of remaining fog, he could make out fifteen or twenty hairy baboon-creatures attacking two other similar beings, easily distinguishable from the rest, by their hairlessness and paleness of color.

Suddenly, one of the pale, hairless beasts picked up a huge club from the clearing's edge and swung it menacingly above his head, howling frightfully at his tormentors. In spite of the wicked looking weapon, the attackers continued to advance on the club-wielder and what appeared to be his mate. Several times, the club connected savagely with one or more shaggy skulls, splitting them open like ripe mellons.

By the time the last streamer of fog had disappeared, the two had been forced out almost to the center of the clearing. Superior numbers having proved too much for them.

It was then that Henry spotted the glint of the time-suit lying directly in the path of the advancing baboons. Another ten yards and they would be trampling over it.

With a yell, Henry dashed out into the clearing, reaching for the pistol-paralyzer as he did so. Horrors—he couldn't find it; it must have dropped

out of his shirt while he climbed down from the tree. He didn't have time to go back now!

Henry began to sweat! His yell had scared the baboon-creatures, and they were now running for the jungle—all except the club-swinger, who, with club upraised, was racing straight for him!

ACTING fast, he picked up the nearest object he saw—a jagged rock—and flung it with all his strength, into the baboon's face! With a sickening crunch, the rock glanced off the beast's head and went spinning into the grass. As it collapsed in a heap, its mate—witnessing the death, and limping from some earlier injury—went whimpering off into the jungle.

Henry stared down at the thing which had fallen almost at his feet. Except for its paleness, and lack of hair or fur, it vaguely resembled a baboon he'd once seen as a kid at a circus. Also, there was a touch of something else about it that reminded him of some other animal.

As the sun rose higher, the shiny reflection of the time suit caught the corner of his eye. The heat was becoming unbearable, and his thirst was beginning to parch his throat. Should he, or should he not, go back and look for the gun? Glancing again at the burning sun and licking his chapped lips, he decided not to.

Crossing over to the time-suit, Henry noted with a sigh of relief that it was exactly as he remembered having left it the night before. Not waiting around for anything else to happen, he stood the suit up, stepped inside, pulled the front half shut, and flicked the ascent lever.

With a dizzy rush, he shot up into the blazing sky. After long minutes, he noted, by glancing down at the green ball of earth, that he'd stopped ascending.

Well, this is it, thought Henry, as he carefully moved the dial needle from the little curlicue design it was now on, clockwise up to the triangular geometric figure it had originally

rested on. Barring any wind-drift, or should he say time-drift, he would soon be stepping out of the suit into his backyard of 1952.

The first thing he would do would be to go straight into the kitchen and quench his thirst. And if Harriet said said one word about where he'd been all night, or why the junk hadn't been removed from the basement, he'd tell her quite bluntly to shut up—that he didn't have to give any accountings to her anymore. Besides, she wouldn't believe him if he told her. Furthermore, from now on he was going to wear *all* the pants in the family.

It was going to be good, seeing Harriet again.

He pushed the button—and again he fell into long ages of darkness.



When consciousness returned, he once more found himself lying on the ground. The sky was a brilliant blue, and the, not-so-hot, sun seemed to be in the same position as when he'd left the prehistoric world of millions of years ago.

About to click the suit open, he glanced to his left. Instead of seeing part of his backyard, he saw nothing but uneven prairie. Quickly, he glanced in the opposite direction. More ragged prairie.

He forgot all about his thirst. Good Lord, had the A-bomb come during the twelve or so hours he'd been away? No, hardly that. Maybe some deadly gas or plague had wiped everything out, including buildings. Frantically, he jerked his thumb away from the suit release-button and slowly managed to get to his feet.

Looking around in all directions, he could see nothing but rough virgin prairie, dotted occasionally with stunted trees and barren rock. The only thing he recognized that told him he was in the right geographical location, was Yellow Rock, which had once stood in front of the city courthouse.

Henry could hardly believe his eyes! Had he made a mistake in setting the dial, and arrived far in the future—or before America had become settled?

Well, there was only one way to find out. Flicking the lever, he was again high in the sky. Looking down in all directions, he could see not the slightest trace of civilization.

FOR AN HOUR or so, Henry experimented with the dial setting—going different time-lengths into the future, then returning and going into the past.

Always the same landscape greeted him. Sometimes it was autumn or summer. Once, in the far future, it had been winter, with everything covered with snow, except Yellow Rock.

Finally, returning the needle to its original position, he returned to his own time.

For a long while, he stood gazing at the desolation all around him—at a loss as to what had become of everything. His thoughts haphazardly wandered back to the prehistoric past, and what had happened there.

Suddenly, he remembered what the other thing was that the baboon-creature had reminded him of! He sank down to the ground, weeping.

It had reminded him of man! *Homo Sapiens!* He pondered, and then everything became clear to him. In killing the baboon-beast, he had unwittingly destroyed some sort of link from which the human race had branched.

Sobs shook Henry's shoulders as he realized that this was the only theory that seemed to explain things. Now, he'd never see Harriet again. In spite of all her faults, he loved her. Nor would Joe the junk man or his students ever know he had changed.

Everything was gone!

Then Henry laughed. He would be gone, too, in a second; all he'd have to do was open the time-suit and step out of what must be its protective field. And he would never have been.

Suddenly, he stopped laughing! There was one possible fantastic way he might remedy matters. Flicking the ascent-lever, he moved the needle counter-clockwise, back to just before the curlicue mark. Then pressed the button...



THERE WAS some time-drift. After the familiar darkness, when he came to, he found himself under the giant fern-tree in which he'd spent the night before, instead of in the clearing.

In an instant, he was out of the suit and staring at a mind-shaking sight in the clearing—his number-one self shouting at the baboons, as the pale hairless link raised his club and headed straight for him!

Henry frantically hunted for the gun he'd lost, as he saw his earlier self pick up the rock to hurl at the link. It had to be here, somewhere around the tree! It was the only logical place he could have lost it.

Glancing up at the drama being acted out for the second time, Henry's heart sank. The rock glanced off the link's head and went spinning into the grass! He hadn't been in time! Now there would never be any humanity!

Dazedly he watched the fantastic sight of himself climbing into the time-suit and disappearing into the sky. Then, returning his gaze to the ground, he caught sight of the gun lying on the far side of the tree. What a joke, he thought as he picked up the pistol—now that it was too late!

Wait a minute! Was it too late? Of course not! All he'd have to do was get back inside his suit, go back in

time a few minutes—this time, with the gun in hand ready to fire—throw open the suit, and let his first self have it. If he failed a second time in bumping his earlier self off before the rock could be thrown, he would keep going back in time until he didn't fail. It was all so simple; why hadn't he realized it sooner?

Once more in the suit, Henry moved the dial needle only slightly. Then, walking out into the clearing where his first self would be, he pressed the button.

This time, the blackness lasted only an instant.

Snapping the suit open, he saw his first self bending over the rock. With a grip of steel, he pointed the gun at his self that was *now* picking up the rock—

Carefully he lined the sight at the small of his first-self's back. He vaguely wondered if he would instantly vanish with the death of his first self—and never see Harriet, or his school, or anybody again.

But if his first self *did* die, or *had* died, how was it that it had gone into the future? How was it that he had returned to the time before his first-self had killed the link? How was it that he had become his second-self who was now going to kill his first-self? Which one of his two selves would die? Or would they both?

The whole thing suddenly reminded him of a story he'd once read called *The Lady Or The Tiger*. Well, there was only one way to find the answer to *his* question—

He squeezed the trigger...

