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TIME TO STOP

A Vignette by Randall Garrett

MR. OSWALD LATIMER leafed through the sheaf of papers that young Aghill had submitted and smiled at his student.

"Bob, I think you've done a marvelous job. You've done an excellent exposition on the subject of time travel into the future. Now, if your apparatus works according to theory, I have no doubt that you'll not only get your Doctorate, but the Nobel Prize."

Dr. Rumfort choked. "Ridiculous! Impossible! Time travel can not be justified mathematically!"

Dr. Latimer smiled at his student, then turned to glare at Dr. Rumfort. "Harry, I think you'd balk at anything if it didn't agree with your theories. Will you shut up? You're here as a witness, not as a Prosecuting Attorney! Please go on, Mr. Aghill."

Robert Aghill was a thin, sheepish-looking young man; he nodded obsequiously as he set his apparatus into motion. He flipped several switches and turned several rheostats. Finally, he pointed wordlessly toward a large plastic bubble that hung suspended in the middle of the lab.

After a moment, he found his voice. "There it is, sirs; a machine that will travel into the future."

Drs. Latimer and Rumfort stared at the machine. It looked like a ten-foot fishbowl which had been turned upside-down over a chair. Inside, it glowed with violet light. Absolutely nothing else happened.

Rumfort, of course, was the first to find his voice. "Do you mean to say that that thing is supposed to be going into the future?"

All three men stood staring at the glowing globe of violet light.

Finally, Aghill said: "Yes sir; that field should project anything within it into the future."

"Bah! Hooey!" shouted Dr. Rumfort. "Let me look at those equations!" He grabbed at the thesis paper and looked it over while Latimer and Aghill watched.

Aghill, in a plea of self-preservation, looked at Dr. Latimer and said: "Please, sir! I *know* that thing's going into the future; I have—"

"AhhHA!" shouted Dr. Rumfort—he was fond of shouting—"There's the error!" He pointed at one line in the manuscript. "That's not an equation!" he snapped "that's an identity!"

Latimer took the paper from Rumfort's hand and looked at the indicated line. After a moment, he looked at young Aghill. "Robert, my boy, I'm afraid Dr. Rumfort is right; the equation *is* an identity."

AGHILL grabbed at the paper and stared at it, a frown on his face. At last, a smile brightened his broad mouth. "I see. You're right, of course; but so am I. The equation shows the identity of applied power with the time flow. The apparatus is travelling into the future at the rate of one second per second!"

At that, Rumfort blew up. "And you call that a time machine? Hah! My dear boy, *everything* goes into future at the rate of one second per second. Look here!" He walked over to the inverted, ten-foot fishbowl, opened the door in its side and stepped in. "Presumably, I am within the time-travelling field now. And I am still here. I am moving into the future at the same rate I always was. The whole thing is stupid! Now suppose I shut it off—" He vigorously punched the cutoff button inside the globe.

Instantly, the violet glow within the globe vanished.

And with it vanished the chair, the control board, and Dr. Rumfort.

Latimer and Aghill stared at the empty plastic bubble. Aghill gulped audibly. "What happened? Where is Dr. Rumfort?"

Latimer looked again at the equations. "I'm afraid you asked the wrong question. According to your formulae, the machine propels things into the future at the rate of one second per second. When it's cut off, naturally, it stops propelling the things in its field. You shouldn't ask *where* Dr. Rumfort is, but *when*."

He glanced at his wristwatch. "I should say he's about thirty seconds ago."

