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TUNNEL 1971

by Charles Einstein

A short-short story

**FROM THE Secret Log-Book of Professor Eustis Quinby, B.S., AAAS,
A.H.S.T.F.:**

March 7, 1970:

Professor Hilgud called. Very excited. Wants to see me right away. Tried to get him interested in my new philosophical thesis, "The Universality of Scientific Discovery," but he says his matter is much more pressing.

March 8, 1970:

Professor Hilgud has discovered brontium!!

March 10, 1970:

Brontium is a metallic element which can be mined economically in great quantities from shoreline deposits bordering any body of salt water. It is *completely insensitive to heat!*

March 22, 1970:

Cold war with Russia continues. Brontium discovery classified top secret.

March 29, 1970:

Great excitement in Washington. Discovery of brontium will enable man to travel as he has never traveled before... *through the earth!*

Professor Hilgud envisions rocket-propelled, cylindrical, three-rail "trains" traveling at six hundred miles per hour.

Can reduce point-to-point traveling distances by as much as thirty-three percent!

Once tunnels are built, only cost for upkeep will be maintenance of vehicles and price of fuel.

Airport-traffic, radio-control, personnel factors of air travel all eliminated, so no trouble—really no real competition in distance travel there. (Great-circle air route from New York to London nearly three thousand miles—down to about

two thousand by tunneling under the Atlantic Ocean.)

Can be all-weather traffic of course!

Great heat as one nears the center of the earth no factor, since brontium not only insensitive to heat but *insulates* as well!

Ventilation to be a problem only in construction of tunnels, since all trains will be seal-ventilated.

March 31, 1970:

Big conference in Washington. Administration brass favors building first tunnel directly through center of earth, using brontium both as construction material and shield.

Idea is to tunnel through to Russia, coming out on vacant lot in Siberia, for movement of men and materials in case Reds start war. Cabinet members point out that Red radar is aimed at sky, not at ground, and therefore, inasmuch as tunnel will come out in unoccupied portion of Siberia, entire tunnel can be constructed without Soviets being aware.

April 9, 1970:

Professor Hilgud pointed out that any tunnel directed through center of earth from any point in U.S.A. would not

come out in Russia, but in Pacific Ocean or Australia.

Also points out prevailing differences between pulls of actual gravity and magnetic gravity, which could pull men one way and metal another and make travelers on proposed routes sick as blazes.

Also points out possibility of unknown factors, such as what happens to a man traveling through the center of the earth where gravity is greatest, then going past it where gravity pulls directly opposite to way it pulled him *toward* earth's center.

April 11, 1970:

Possibility human being would turn inside out?

June 14, 1970:

Proposed tunnel to Russia will lie *north* (if that's the word, of the earth's center throughout. Will come out other side just north of Outer Mongolia line.

Entrance point in U.S. will be a place in eastern Pennsylvania.

September 4, 1970:

Secret construction work begins tomorrow. Perfected drilling equipment and abundance

of brontium makes completion within a year almost certain.

September 9, 1970:

Code name is Tunnel 1971, designating year of completion.

December 18, 1970:

Sandhogs' union wants to know what will happen to man who falls into tunnel?

Government experts say this mainly a problem for future tunnel directly through earth's center, in which conceivably man could fall, go past center till gravity pulls him back the other way, and continue like a yo-yo.

But excavation will illustrate whether, using brontium, interior of earth can be made habitable.

Professor Hilgud envisions a day when local trains as well as expresses may be feasible.

January 9, 1971:

They're off! Actual tunneling began today.

February 20, 1971:

Under Brooklyn Heights. All well.

May 6, 1971:

More than half way across the Atlantic.

June 4, 1971:

Cryptic message from Dr. Hilgud. All work stopped.

June 6, 1971:

The tunnel was about half-way completed when work was stopped. Seeking details.

June 9, 1971:

What happened was that a work crew of 50 men entered tunnel from Pennsylvania entrance on June first. On June third they returned, but of fifty workers, only forty-nine spoke English. Remaining man was someone none had ever seen before, and he talked nothing but Russian. Meanwhile, one of our own men was missing.

June 16, 1971:

Some incoherent babbling about meeting the Russians coming the other way, but nothing concrete. Professor Hilgud in seclusion.

July 2, 1971:

My philosophical thesis, "The Universality of Scientific Discovery," has become popular. Sales are up forty-three percent, and reports still coming in suggest that this is...

THE END