



Faster Than Light

by J. Harvey Haggard.

“**G**ENTLEMEN”, is there anyone present who is afraid to die?”

It was several moments after this astounding question had penetrated the monotonous humdrum sounds of the interior of the speeding monoway that I realized its significance. My brain seemed at first to take only subconscious notice of the statement, but my mind analyzing its meaning at peaceful leisure suddenly started, awakened to frightened expectancy.

The monoway was not crowded. Only a person here or there occupied seats to either side of the narrow aisle which ran the length of the passenger compartment of the monorail. Yet each and every person was staring intently toward the forward end of the car, where a little man stood silently, regarding us with a queer grim smile playing about his lips. Just behind him stood the conductor, who clutched wildly at the seat nearest him, and stared

beyond us in frozen terror—a horrible fear pictured in the paralyzed muscles which contorted his mouth into a leering grimace.

“Gentlemen,” repeated the little man, calmly. I saw that he had the attention of everyone present in the car. “Is there anyone here afraid to die? If so, it would be most opportune that he should say his prayers. The monoway, speeding through thin-space between Paris-station and New York, has broken from the gravity of the earth and is now rapidly gaining speed as it falls swiftly towards the sun!”

Thus concluding, he sat down calmly. The conductor had flung a hand before his face, hiding from our eyes the terrible expression written there.

For a full minute all was silence, a dead frozen silence, in which no man moved, but stared incredulously at the place where the scene had been enacted by the calm little man.

Then all were shouting, leaping. A huge Englishman, burly and red-faced, brushed roughly by me and sprang up the aisle, knocking the paper I had been reading from my numbed hands. A young woman with a child suddenly screamed and gathered the frightened child to her frantic breast, and his infant wails were soon added to her own wild lamentations. A spectacled clerical man in front of me rose to his feet, paused, the fingers of one hand resting feebly upon his chin. A long lanky Yankee started in his seat, then settled back, his blue eyes in troubled retrospection, a tongue wetting his dry lips.

Springing to my feet, I stumbled down the aisle, yelling incoherent phrases of no meaning, my dazed brain I striving to inure itself to the new conditions. The Englishman had already reached the side of the small man, and was shouting to him, clutching at him, who in turn was endeavoring to ward him off. The conductor had slumped to a seat and buried his face into his hands.

For a long space of time all was hubbub, my cries added to those of the Englishman, the sobs of the conductor crackling high and dry through the raucous noise, the falsetto wails of the mother and the frightened cries of the babe adding to the conglomeration. ...

I have no way of recording all those sensations which then smote me, for my mentality was numbed, and my memory will not revive those impressions received during the next few minutes—or hours? I only know that it seemed an eternity, that I seemed tired and exhausted, sitting weakly on the edge of the seat behind the little man, one hand propping up my chin. The Englishman had assumed a position across the aisle, and was still babbling at the little man. The woman's crying had subsided somewhat. There arose a dull monotone which rose and fell, and I recognized the tone of a man who supplicated God for protection.

THEN a droll humorous chuckle sounded in my ears and a drawling voice admonished with no trace of emotion, "You say, Professor, somethin' went wrong with th' engin'."

Everyone in the car leaned forward.

"Nothing of the kind, my dear boy," returned the ready voice of the little man. I realized by their enunciation that a conversation had been progressing between the two for several moments. "You are no doubt familiar with the fact that the monoway of today is controlled by radio waves. There is no such thing as an engin' in a modern monoway, as you are no doubt aware."

"Wal, there's very little I reckon I know about a monoway," reiterated the languid voice with some show of interest.

This sensible—yet insane—conversation, under the circumstances, revived me to some extent to a logical realization of facts. Raising my head I perceived that the little man termed "Professor" was turned to converse with the Yankee, who still sprawled in the seat which he had first occupied.

"So," exclaimed the Professor, turning to me. "Another to join in this conversation?"

"Yes," spoke the long fellow indolently, rubbing his chin meditatively, "A little 'tate a tate' before death, you might say."

"Yes," agreed the Professor. "Most admirably put, though somewhat crude. However, I am very interested in analyzing human thoughts upon the approach of death. Scientifically, it is very intriguing!"

"Oh, shure, shure. Theoretically beautiful, but how-some-ever impractical, my dear Professor."

I sat listening to this conversation, heedless of its meaning, thinking only of the monoway falling toward destruction, yet at the same time the words of the pair registered on my brain as the ravings of men suddenly demented at the portal of death.

“Why!” I exclaimed. “We are all crazy!”

The declaration was meaningless. The Yankee laughed and rubbed his chin. The little man stared at me with scientific interest in his eyes.

“Interesting,” he remarked. “Very.”

“Yet, Professor, perfectly natural.”

Thereafter I decided to be quiet, merely staring dazedly at them.

“The peregrinations of a human mind are always interesting in emotional crises,” remarked the Professor.

“Shure. I agree with yu’ there, only o’ course I can’t talk and tell what I want to and what I think about, like yu’. Anyhow, it’s just as interesting. I get lots of kick just lookin’ kinda’ from outside into my own brain and watchin’ the turmoil that’s even now ragin’ within, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I understand.”

For a time they lapsed into silence, the Professor staring into space, the Yankee surveying the sole of his shoe, which had been elevated upon a crossed knee.

“Listen, damn you!” snarled the Englishman desperately, clenching his fist and scowling at the little man. “You must get us out of this. Think, man, think! There’s got to be a way!”

The Professor shook his head. I fell to insane laughter. The Englishman lurched in his seat, held his hands to his throbbing temples.

“By the way,” remarked the Professor to the Yankee. “What say we take a little glimpse of the heavenly bodies?”

“Agreed.” The pair arose and progressed to the front of the car to a small desk and chair which the conductor generally occupied.

MANIPULATING a small boxlike compartment, a side of the car was

suddenly changed into a brilliant view of the heavenly bodies, the sun occupying the center of an intensely lighted void. The Yankee stared.

“Merely,” explained the Professor, “a periscopical arrangement connected with the exterior of the monoway.”

“The monoway is—or was—operated—until it left the earth’s atmosphere—by electrical impulses. Of course our monoway is little different in principle than the old antique monorails of the twentieth century, merely varying in the fact that instead of using as a guiding stabilizer a solid rail the exterior of the monoway is so designed as to maintain an equilibrium throughout the earth’s atmosphere. At either side we have the gigantic discs of glasslike substances spinning at enormous speeds, which gyroscopic motion keeps our monoway on an even keel.

“Our passenger compartment, supplied with oxygen as it climbs to the upper air reaches, is situated between this pair of gyroscopes, while a smaller gyroscope spins above us on a perpendicular plane to the others. Now this periscope—from which you vision the heavenly bodies—is connected to an enormous lens in front of the passenger car which looks directly in the direction which our car is speeding. If, however, any other view of the heavens is wished, various mirrors are arranged in the bases encircling the gyroscopes, so situated that we are enabled to get any view of the cosmos from the original periscope.”

Saying this, the Professor swiftly moved his hands about the minute boxlike compartment and the scene upon the opposite wall shifted.

“Purty good, purty good,” complimented the Yankee.

Just then the scene seemed suddenly to blur. The Professor appeared puzzled.

“Whatsa’ matter?” queried the Yankee.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," admonished the Professor, noting the recordings of several dials at his side and swiftly making some computations.

Suddenly the woman behind me fell to weeping more loudly.

"Pray, my good woman," shouted a reverent voice, which I knew to be that of the clerical-looking man. "Pray, pray." And he set an example by subsiding again into his religious monotone. The baby squealed, the woman wept hysterically, and the conductor sobbed.

"My heavens!" shouted the Professor, in astonishment for the first time. He wildly figured and refigured, as if unable to believe his senses.

"Look at that!" he cried waving his paper and pencil before the Yankee. "Look at that! Can't you see that the scene through the periscope is fading! I've figured it out! I've figured it out. The force of gravity, acceleration, velocity, see, see!"

"I am afraid," replied the Yankee imperturbably, "that I can't see."

However he glanced at the side wall and scrutinized it swiftly, noting that the scene was swiftly blurring and fading.

"Look! Look!" shouted the Professor in high ecstasy. "Why, man—think of it! Think of it! We are approaching the *speed of light!* We are never to die by rushing into the sun! No. We shall die peacefully, happily—long before that. We shall simply cease to be! Hooray! Hooray!"

"I'm afraid," stammered the Yankee, "I don't see your point!"

"The first men to approach the speed of light!" shouted the Professor, not noting in his emotional outburst the others query. "Imagine! One hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second. Incredible! Remarkable! A-maazing!"

"But—"

"And we shall suffer no horrible death.

We shall go peacefully—as befits those who contemplate science."

"I am sorry to tell yu' that I can't see!"

"Why, the *Fitzgerald Contraction.*"

"The—what?"

"The Fitzgerald Contraction! What, man, haven't you heard of that? Why, an object which travels at the speed of light has no length. When we reach the speed of light we shall simply cease to have any measurements. See! See! The light is fading on the periscope. It means we are coming closer. 186,000. 186,000. We are going faster every minute. D'ye see now?"

A LOOK of stupefied wonderment and admiration spread across the features of the Yankee. With a pleased grin he leaned against the desk and stared abstractedly at the dimming image.

"This is goin' to be purty good," he complimented, "Purty good!"

The woman screamed; maybe she understood his words.

"Pray! Pray!" shouted the clerical man.

"For God's sake, Professor," stormed the Englishman. "If you don't save us I'll kill you!" He beat his fists together futilely.

"Purty good," sighed the Yankee. "Purty good."

"Ha, yes," cried the Professor, his eyes burning with scientific zeal. "Another minute of life, I calculate it. It will be a great experiment. Ha, Fitzgerald, we shall see if you lied."

"By the way!" exclaimed the Yankee, struck by a sudden thought.

"One minute more—" interrupted the Professor.

"By the way, I'm dawgoned glad to have met you—"

"Three-quarters!"

"Yu" know, yu're a man after me own heart—fearless of death—scornful of human sentiment. Glad to have met yu', feller."

“ONE-HALF!”

“My name is Hankins. Lon Hankins. What’s yu’rs?”

“ONE-QUARTER! Carlton. Professor E. Pluribus Carlton.”

“Glad to hev’ met yu’. *Shake, feller, shake!*”

The Yankee grasped the Professor’s outstretched hand. The room suddenly became brilliant with an intense light.

Crash!

A million variations of brilliant colors—and—a soothing peaceful motion—a restful invigorating color of blue pervaded the air and—

“Wal I’ll be darned!”

“Unanimous, *my dear Hankins!*”

The ejaculations were of that breathless quality which express the insuperable degree of amazement.

I looked at the screen upon the side wall. A scene of wonderment and color met my eye. The Professor and Hankins were staring at the screen open-mouthed—for—

A world! —an utterly new world—greeted their startled eyes!

A great broad sphere floated serenely below. Thick jungles of green vegetation covered the exterior while a broad azure lake could be seen, its surface waters perfectly clear and reflecting the profusely vegetated shores clearly. However, it was neither the lake nor the primeval forests below which attracted their immediate attention....

At various intervals through the jungles arose tall mounds of raw earth, in the center of each there being inset a great dome of a jewel-like hue. The faintest tint of pink seemed to exude from the exterior of the dome like radio-active emanations. In the exact center of each dome was a large pit—around its outer edges ran a ledge from which looked numerous doors, methodically arranged. The scene, pictured with a brilliancy of colors

unknown upon earthly objects, was further portrayed by the clear blue atmosphere which surrounded the little planet. Off in the distance two miniature suns floated calmly, their light but dimly affecting the clarity of the scene below—which seemed to be lighted by the emanations from the domes themselves.

For moments Professor Carlton stared speechless, then he sighed. Casting a loving glance at his computations he slowly ripped the sheet of figures to shreds. Suddenly he stopped, electrified by a sudden idea.

“I have it!” he cried, smiting a fist into his palm delightedly. “We are in another world—another plane of existence! We are safe. Don’t you see, we have progressed into speed and into a different cosmos.”

“Undoubtedly,” returned the Yankee, still absorbed in the picture upon the side of the monoway. “But as f’r me, I take that for granted. I allus said that science was based too much on hypothesis.”

“But it’s not!” ejaculated the Professor vehemently. “It decidedly is not!”

“Then, my good comrade, how do you account for this Fitzgerald theory as you calls it!”

“That’s it. That’s it exactly. Fitzgerald was right.”

“Impossible.”

“No. When our racing monoway was drawn from the earth’s gravity and fell at ever increasing speed toward the sun it soon approached the speed of light. As we fell faster and faster our length in the direction of the sun progressed into nothingness. Then—it reached the speed of light—passed it. Now—mind you this—when the monoway attained the speed of light it was of a minus length, therefore it is not existent materially to our other world. On the other hand, since we have decreased materially to nil, yet relatively we are still existent. Can’t you see?”

The Yankee had listened rather

attentively, but he now slowly shook his head.

THE Professor became exasperated. "Listen, you numbskull!" he cried. "Now I'll illustrate, just on your account. I'll go back to the beginning of things and show you how this thing happened.

"Long, long ago the cosmos was in its making. Whether it was but a whirling mass of gas or whatever it was no one can know, but we do know that the worlds and suns and comets and all of the heavenly bodies were flung far out into space. Now, we cannot say that all of these bodies were flung away at the same rate of speed—indeed, we can logically conjecture that there was a vast difference of the speed of the flying objects.

"Anyway, there were many bodies which traveled at a speed vastly different from that of our own solar system. Now—cogitate—if you can. Astral bodies, flying at all speeds throughout the great curvature of space.

"Very well. Now upon earth we knew that if an object traveled at the speed of light it is nonexistent in one direction. However, did we realize that many things *do* travel at the speed of light. That in fact, vast cosmos is traveling at the speed of light, worlds we do not know, planets we have not dreamed of. And because they have no earthly dimension in one direction their physical manifestations are not apparent.

"In other words, this world below us is traveling at the speed of light, occupying at the same time the space which is occupied by our planet—by Mars, by Mercury, by our sun. Yet, because it possessed no length at the time of intersection, this world passes through ours—do you understand that?"

"I'm turribly afeard I cain't!"

"Of course I cannot expect you to. But the glory of my discovery! The wonder fulness of it! If only we could again reach earth. My name would be written alongside

Fitzgerald, beside Einstein. Oh, Fate! The ingloriousness of my fate!"

"Maybe," drawled the Yankee, "if you'd look down there at those funny dome things stickin' out of the forest you'd be surer than ever that yore fate is acomin'."

He pointed below. A vast number of tiny objects were swarming from the pink-tinted domes below.

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the Professor. "I had an idea that the domes were the abodes of inhabitants of this realm. Ree-markable."

"Oh, yes. Dawgone enlightenin' as you might put it, but how about it if they don't like our presence here?"

"You mean if they are antagonistic?"

"Exactly."

"Hmm. I hadn't thought of that."

The swarm of tiny dots floated swiftly up into the atmosphere nearer to the monoway. As they approached it became obvious that each inhabitant was enclosed in a queer suit of metal. A glass headgear surrounded the head of a man who strangely resembled the large glassy-eyed embryo of a frog. A pair of waving tentacles stretched into the air, from which emanated a greenish light. Two portholes at either side of the metal suit carried a small disk from which shot a white intense beam at various times. It was evident that the fellows had communicated with others of the dome structures for swarms of their fellows soon joined them and congregated about the monoway, their faces peering angrily and curiously into the screen on the side of the monoway.

Suddenly the faces on the screen parted and one who we assumed to be leader stared us angrily in the face.

"*Who is within?*" I can swear we heard the question, yet we knew no voice had spoken.

The Yankee grinned. Professor Carlton smiled.

"Telepathy," he explained swiftly to

the Yankee.

Suddenly anger swept the leader's face, and he gestured with his antennae to his fellow inhabitants who swam about the craft. Instantly whitish beams seared the exterior surfaces. The effect was but to heat the atmosphere to a stifling point.

The inhabitants of the other plane seethed about angrily.

"You may notice," said Professor Carlton interestedly. "That the fellows are very small compared to our earthly stature. Doubtless we would appear as great giants to them, and the exterior of our monoway must appear as an enormous structure to them."

The scene suddenly dimmed. I heard the Englishman behind me curse, the baby whimpered.

"Gad!" shouted the professor. "Look. Look. They are dimming. We are going back into the lower speeds. We have been long enough above the speed of light. See what's happening?"

"No, I don't."

"Why, when we reached the speed of light we had no length. But we had an infinite mass. Our speed, which had been caused by the pull of the sun's gravity, had somewhat reached above 186,000 miles per second. However, having infinite mass, we have been having a tug of war with the sun to see which could pull the other away. But the friction obtained from various objects in this plane which travels above the light speed is slowing us down. We will again enter into our own world."

"Fine!" snorted the Yankee sarcastically. "But we shall still fall into the sun."

"I think not! I think not! Listen—when we fell away from the earth toward the sun we fell in a great curve. Having attained the speed of light we ceased to be, but kept progressing

in that curve—on a different plane! No, we ought to be approaching the earth now instead of receding away from it. Do you see? Do you see?"

The Yankee looked doubtful. Then his face lit with a grin.

"Purty good," he complimented. "Purty good."

Suddenly all within the monoway was running, bustling. The Englishman brushed by me and sprang for the throat of the professor, the song of the "Jolly Roger" upon his lips. Lon Hankins, the Yankee, squatted suddenly on his haunches and grinned, his face splitting in a great yawn of delight, whereupon he began to howl like a coyote. The professor, pinned beneath the crazed Englishman, was saying the nursery rhyme of "Humpty Dumpty" backwards. The young woman with the babe sprang past me, her babe clinging to her undone hair and dragging over the floor behind her while the infant gurgled with delight. An alarm clock swung by my head and bounced from the young lady's head. I knew the clerical looking man had thrown it.

Stretching to my full height I reached over and tore a seat from the monoway, swinging it about my head before I crashed it into the lights!

"Fish!" I yelled. "F-I-S-H!"

They brought me to in the hospital as I was struggling on that morning of May, 1940. I stared up into the sympathetic faces of the attending doctor and his nurses.

"Why—where am I? Where am I?"

"Quiet. Quiet, my dear fellow. Now go back to sleep. You were on a street-car which was held up by bandits and zero gas was thrown in your face. It almost got you. Its effects are oftentimes very strange, producing weird hallucinations. Now, off with you, back to sleep, my young fellow. Back to sleep!"