

QUEST IN TIME

By Sklifo

(NOTE: The characters in the following tale are entirely fictitious, and any similarity to actual persons, living or disappeared, is entirely coincidental.)

Now that Tridee has returned, though somewhat changed by his experience, I feel that I can tell you just what we planned and how we failed. For although Tridee has followed my way back, he has failed to bring with him what we sought and located but unfortunately were unable to take away. No, I can't say that our efforts were entirely fruitless, for shortly we shall have here on this table for all to see one item which is scarcely worth turning your heads to see. Perhaps that is why we are able to have it with us. Certainly, in spite of its size, it will never be - never was - missed. Surely that must be the sole reason for Nature's laws allowing the thing to be removed.

Four years ago the members of this association began to hear the first rumors of our ambitious quest. That was in the year 2023. From time to time curious people asked for information, but we told very little of our plans. However, it was soon guessed that the two of us were attempting time travel. At that time we had just celebrated the centennial of an important step in the eventual founding of this association. With so many people present at the celebration, we found it difficult to restrain ourselves totally on the subject of our plans, and so a little news thus was spread throughout the entire solar system.

By and by, several of you commenced to comment on Tridee's frequent absences from our bi-weekly meetings, and since I usually was acquainted with Tridee's whereabouts, I was invariably interrogated whenever I attended a meeting, though my attendance was not very regular either. I remember that I remarked that he was off somewhere collecting data for a report, and you let it go at that.

But that was merely putting it mildly. I need not explain here and now how we discovered the constant mental-physical radiation which must be compensated for in constructing a mechanism for corporeal transmission in time. By now most of you probably have read the report which Tridee and I submitted to the Interplanetary Scientific Control Society. This report describes in detail the construction of the machine and also the theory on which it works. This mechanism is very small and of light weight, is self-powered, and can be carried about in a small case. Of course, it is understood that in addition to being a machine for time travel, this device also enables one to travel geographically. The possibilities for future use of this machine are numerous, for by adjustment of the controls, the mentality alone may search out distant worlds or distant times, and then by further mental control the body may be made to materialize in any desired spot. In this way physical danger is minimized, for the body need not accompany the mentality to cold localities, for instance, for observation there. I shall point out here that our visit to the past covered a period about four times longer than the time that has elapsed in our present century, for naturally we could return to any particular day or month in our own time, irrespective of the time spent in the past.

As a working center Tridee chose the western coast of this continent in what was formerly called the State of California, and later he particularly concentrated his efforts in that interesting city of Los Angeles, which sank beneath the ocean in the year 1972.

Tridee discovered that he could cause his mentality to influence the thoughts of others whom he visited in the past. Thus he was able to help bring about certain conditions which he felt were necessary in order to collect the objects he wanted. He began his activities during the late 1920's in northern California, where he found an ideal subject upon which to center his mental suggestions.

I am unable at present to name the precise nature of Tridee's quest. The Fortieth Interceptor Command has requested this, since my talk is being televised, and in war time there are certain things that must not be told. However, at the conclusion of the televised portion of this assembly, I shall be at liberty to give you a little more information.

Tridee so associated himself with the identity of the person he selected that the two of them became generally similar in characteristics and personality, and their physical resemblance was very striking. Tridee's twin even became known by a name strangely similar to his own. Tridee seldom appeared physically in this past time, but at all times he was in complete rapport with his twin. Regularly, this twin consulted with representative people from all over the nation and corresponded with many others from various parts of the world. Gradually he was able to accumulate a large reservoir of the kind of object for which Tridee was searching. Tridee's plan was to take with him a large quantity of these articles when he returned into his own time.

Up until now I have said nothing of my own activities in the past. Rather than use a person already established in the past, I projected my body as well as my mentality into the past. Several times I was almost embarrassingly caught in the act of appearing or disappearing from one time to another. Several of my acquaintances came close to discovering this, but they merely joked innocently about it. My presence with Tridee was due mostly to natural curiosity on my part, and I found a great opportunity to do some research on certain subjects of particular interest to me. I did not contact Tridee's twin publicly until the latter years of our stay. When I returned more or less permanently to the present (I explained my disappearance to my friends by saying that I was going on a long trip), we had agreed that Tridee was to follow me in a few days, together with the objects he had collected. He planned to leave the past at the same time his twin was called away on government business. In those last few years a world conflict had developed, and Tridee's twin was drafted into the war. Since this fact was known to the twin's acquaintances, Tridee could no longer use this person as his medium. However, he had collected all the objects

he wanted, so he decided to leave then rather than control the mind of some other person or project his body itself into the past. Once, Tridee and I had manipulated a change between him and his twin so that Tridee could personally appear at a society meeting which the twin regularly attended, but unfortunately his first bodily transition nauseated Tridee so that he was forced to spend the time of his stay in bed. This in turn caused great anxiety on the part of the society members, for never before had their fellow member failed to attend a meeting unless out of the city. Accordingly, a delegation of them paid a visit to Tridee following the meeting. Tridee, lying ill in bed, feared they would see that he was not the person they thought he was, but his resemblance was so close to his twin that in the dim light of the room no one noticed any difference except that he "looked sick."

Naturally, this changing of Tridee with his twin necessitated cooperation on the part of the twin; and since from time to time he had been given bits of information about our quest, we now let him know the complete story. I brought this twin with me to one of our own meetings, and no one noticed the substitution of him with Tridee. Indeed, I found it difficult, in fact, impossible to detect any physical difference. Tridee's twin was delighted with his visit to our century, and he expressed a desire to spend much more time here. However, we found this somewhat inconvenient and did nothing further about it.

In what he had decided to make his last few days in the past, Tridee began to realize that he enjoyed being there and that he would never be satisfied to stay in his own world. A consultation with his twin brought out the fact that the twin similarly, would be dissatisfied to remain in his own time after tasting the wonders of the future. So a strange thing was decided: Tridee was to take his twin's place in the past, while the twin was to substitute for Tridee in the future, taking with him the collection of objects. Tridee's twin dropped a hint of these plans to one of his club members when asked if he would write, to which he inadvertently replied, "Well, I don't know. A lot of us have been drafted, and we never hear from them again." Of course, the real meaning behind this statement was never guessed.

I notice many of you bear quizzical expressions at what I have just said. Yes, the man sitting next to me is not our friend Tridee, as we have led you to believe. This fact will explain to you the slight change in mental makeup since his return which some of you have observed in what you thought was Tridee. This man who is now with us was known in the past by the name of "Forrie," which, as I have said, is strangely similar to the name "Tridee."

The televised portion of this meeting is now at an end, and I shall now reveal to you the nature of Tridee's quest.

While I think of it, I might tell you that one of Tridee's first acts after he had had officially changed places with Forrie was to discard the latter's absurd bright green rimmed glasses for a little more conventional type. Naturally, in order to pretend to be Forrie, he had to wear glasses of some sort. He displayed these new rims at the last meeting he attended, and some members did not even notice the change.

Since our club library is sadly lacking in issues of early publications, Tridee, as librarian, greatly desired to fill in some of those unfortunate gaps. We all know how difficult it is these days to pick up any used magazines even as old as the early 2000's. So what could be more fitting a solution than to get those magazines from the past? At our centennial celebration of the founding of "Weird Tales" magazine we dropped only the gentlest of hints as to our intentions. But what Tridee set out to do was to contact the Father of our Society, Forrest J. Ackerman, known as "Forrie." Now, I have said that Tridee decided to have Forrie bring the objects to us since he himself was not returning; and those objects, of course, were a vast library of scientifiiction and fantasy fiction from that Golden Age of the 1920's, '30's, and '40's. Tridee had persuaded Forrie to carry his time machine with him almost continually in a brief case (that is how I carried mine); and when the time came for transporting the magazines to the present time, Forrie carried his time machine to his room, where he had accumulated complete sets of choice publications.

And then came disappointment. Forrie could cause himself to go into the future, but the magazines would stay behind. Apparently nothing could go into the future bodily from the past unless it had come into the past from the future. Forrie and Tridee were now identical twins, and only because of the fact that Tridee had come out of the future was Forrie able to go into it.

I have said, though, that he was able to bring one object with him. Yes, that is so. In desperation, Forrie grabbed at various magazines, trying each one out on the time machine, but in vain. His last try was a rather large object, and he was so disgusted with its successful transporting that he tried no more. As I stated at the beginning of my talk, certainly it could never have been missed in its own time, and somehow it was able to slip through the time stream into the present. This worthless magazine, which is at least two inches in thickness, is a 1942 "Amazing Quarterly."

What? Those now members of you who were latecomers this evening want to know my name? I am Arthur Louis Joquel, II.

(The End)