

The TIME-RAIDER

By EDMOND HAMILTON

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"He dangled helplessly in the thing's embrace."

CHAPTER 1

THE CANNELL MYSTERY

In beginning this account of our great adventure, it must be understood that I attempt no complete history of the matter. There will be gaps, many gaps, in the continuity of my story, for that story remains, after all, simply a record of my own contacts with the Raider, and with those people whose lives he entered and darkened. So that my tale here is necessarily one of personal experience, except for a few places where I have summarized general knowledge.

Besides this history of what I may term the more human side of our experience, Dr. Lantin has dealt with its scientific aspects in his epochal work on time-displacement and in our joint monograph on electronic acceleration. Although several salient features of the affair have been omitted, for reasons that will figure later, yet the two works mentioned and the present record give a broad outline of the whole matter, from the beginning.

From the beginning! But where was that beginning? Ages back in the past, or ages ahead in the future? To place the true beginning of it all would be to know much about it that we do not know. So I start at the point where the matter definitely entered my own life and world. And that point, that event, is the Cannell Mystery, as it was then termed.

You will find it in the newspapers of the day, the bare facts wrapped in clouds of speculation. Professor Ferdinand Cannell,

of New York, disappearing inexplicably in the jungles of Indo-China, vanishing from the world of men as though blotted out.

At that time, Cannell was undoubtedly one of the very greatest of living archeologists. Nominally attached to a great New York museum, he was really a free-lance student and excavator, roaming about the world in search of proof for his numerous and startling theories. His first fame had been established by his researches into the Dravidian remnants in lower India, and he had followed that brilliant achievement by another as great, the monumental Warren Society investigation into the walled ruins of Zimbabwe, in South Africa.

With two such successes behind him, Cannell then boldly proposed to make the subject of his next researches the mighty ruined city of Angkor, in the heart of the Cambodian jungle. Angkor has long been a colossal challenge to modern wisdom, a gigantic, towered metropolis of gray stone, once noisy with the life of swarming millions, but silent and dead now, unutterably dead. A thousand years the huge ruin has lain in the jungle, wrapped in silence, inhabited only by snakes and bats and tigers. Its past, the history of its builders, has been a vast enigma always, which Cannell had determined to solve.

So he sailed for Hongkong, and Dr. Lantin and I were on the dock when his ship cleared. My own acquaintance with Cannell was recent, but Lantin and he had been close friends for years. Their friendship dated back to their university days, and had continued after they diverged into different lines of work, Cannell's taking him to the remnants of past peoples, while Lantin's interest in radio-chemistry had brought him to the

great New York laboratories of the Downe Foundation, with myself as his laboratory assistant.

For all their warm friendship, there was a strong contrast between the two men. Cannell was the younger by a few years, a blond giant of thirty-five or thirty-six, with snapping blue eyes and a habit of talking with machine-gun rapidity. Altogether the antithesis of Dr. Lantin, who was dark, medium of stature and quiet of manner, with friendly gray eyes that could take on the glint of steel, at times.

Together we had waved farewell to Cannell and a few weeks later had received a cable from Saigon, in Indo-China, briefly announcing his arrival. He had then proceeded up the Mekong River into the wilderness of the interior, and finally over a network of winding creeks to Angkor itself. The latter stage of the journey was made in canoes, some seven or eight natives poling along Cannell and his outfit, but no other white man was in the party.

No more was heard of the venture until a week later, when the natives of Cannell's party straggled into a little up-river village, without him. They explained, volubly, that on the third night after reaching Angkor, the white man had been seized and carried away by the devils of the ruins. None of them had actually seen this but they had heard his scream, from a distance, and when they conquered their fears enough to search the ruins, had found no trace of him. It was clear that the powerful spirits of the dead city were angered, and had snatched away the white man who dared to disturb them, so the terror-stricken natives had at once fled from the place with all speed.

On hearing this tale, several French planters made their way to Angkor, forcing the unwilling natives to accompany them, but they found no trace of Cannell, who seemed to have vanished completely. His tent and outfit were found, quite undisturbed, which tended to corroborate the natives' story regarding their sudden flight.

So when the little search-party returned, it was advanced as its opinion that Cannell had been seized and carried away by a roving tiger, his scream and disappearance being interpreted by the natives as a visitation of demons, since they were known to be extremely superstitious in regard to the dead city. While this explanation was faulty enough, it seemed the only rational one available, and was accepted by the authorities at Saigon.

And so the matter rested. Cannell's only relatives had been distant connections, and except for Lantin he had had scarcely one intimate friend, so after the first shock of surprize his passing caused little stir. The newspapers speculated briefly, and the archeological journals expressed regrets, referring to his splendid achievements. But that was all. New stars soon rose to fill his place in the scientific firmament. And Cannell was forgotten.

Time drove on. Days ... months ... years....

CHAPTER 2

CANNELL'S STORY

I pass to that June night, over three years after Cannell's disappearance, when my own part in the drama may be said to begin. Lantin and I were working late in our laboratory at the Foundation, when we were interrupted by the telephone bell. We had reached a critical point in our experiment, and as Lantin hurried over to the instrument, I heard him muttering threats to have it removed. I did not catch his first answer, but after a minute's silence he flung out a single word, in a strange voice, that startled me.

"Cannell!"

At once I hastened over to his side, and as I did so, he turned toward me a face eloquent of astonishment, still holding the receiver to his ear. "I'll be there in ten minutes!" he shouted into the instrument, then hung up and turned to face my excited questions.

"Good God, Wheeler," he cried, "it's Cannell!"

"What?" I asked, stupidly, dumfounded by the assertion.

"Cannell," he repeated, "at my apartment. He says to meet him there at once. Where could he have been, these three years?"

But I was already reaching for my hat and a moment later we were on the street outside, hailing a cruising taxi. Lantin's bachelor home was in the west 70's, a little roof-bungalow set

on top of a big apartment building, and we sped up the avenue toward it with the highest legal speed.

Lantin did not speak at all, on the way. He was plainly highly excited, but my own agitation was fast calming. After all, I thought, the thing might be a stupid practical joke, though an unforgivable one to perpetrate. Still, if Lantin had recognized the voice—Before I could ask him about that, the cab stopped, and we hastened into the building, to the elevator.

When the cage stopped at its highest point in the building, Lantin was instantly out and striding eagerly across the foyer of his apartment. He flung the door open, then stopped short. Standing behind him, I peered over his shoulder into the room inside. There was a man there, a man who jumped to his feet and came quickly toward us. It was Cannell, I saw at once. Cannell—but changed.

His face was drawn and haggard, and instead of his former impatient, challenging expression, it bore the impress of an unearthly fear. A fear that showed even in the tense, half-crouching position of his body, as he came across the room toward us, searching our faces with his burning eyes. He came closer, gripped Lantin's hands, struggled to speak.

"Thank God you came, Lantin!" he cried, chokingly.

We stood speechless, and with a sudden reaction of feeling he stepped back and sank wearily into a chair, running his hand tiredly over his eyes. Lantin found his voice then for the first time.

"Where have you been, man?" he shouted. "Three years! For God's sake, Cannell, what happened to you? Where were you all that time?"

Cannell gazed up at us, strangely, somberly, a brooding darkness settling on his face. "All that time?" he repeated, musingly. "Three years? Three years to you, perhaps, but not to me. But not to me."

A sudden glance flashed between Lantin and myself. Was the man mad? Did that account for his strange disappearance?

Cannell saw and interpreted that glance. "I know what you're thinking," he told us, "and sometimes I think you're right, that I really am crazy. I would be better off if I were," he concluded, darkly. But before we could comment on his strange words, his mood changed abruptly and he motioned us to chairs beside him, bending toward us in sudden eagerness.

"But you two," he said, "I can tell you what I saw, what happened. I could not tell others—no! They would never have believed, and it may be that even you will not. But it is all truth—truth, I tell you!" And on the last words his voice rose to a high-pitched, ragged scream. Then, mastering his shattered nerves with an effort, he went on.

"You know why I went to Angkor, what I planned to do there. I went up the Mekong by steamer, then hired natives to take me the rest of the way in canoes. Up winding waterways they took me, through narrow creeks and old canals, and out over a great lake, in which a forest lay submerged. Then up another creek and finally by bullock-cart to Angkor itself.

"There is no use trying to describe the place to you. I have seen most of the great ruins of the past and the great buildings of the present, but Angkor towers above them all, the most magnificent thing ever built by the hands of men. It is a vast city of carved gray stone, a city whose lacelike sculptured walls and crenelated battlements have looked down for a thousand years on nothing but the jungle that hems it in, and the silence and death that lie incarnate in itself. Literally acres of ruined buildings, square miles of crumbling stone, and set in the heart of that great mass of remnants, the palace, Angkor Thom, a great ruin whose courts and walls and terraces lie as desolate and broken as the city around them.

"A deep moat surrounds the city, and out over it leads a great causeway, built of huge blocks of stone, a wide, level highway that leads through the jungle for a short distance to the supreme glory of the place, Angkor Wat, the gigantic temple. Unlike the palace and city, the temple has not fallen into ruins but remains nearly the same as it must have been when the city was living and splendid. It towers up to a tremendous height, its dark, frowning walls looming far above the green jungle around it. When I walked into it for the first time, the mighty grandeur of the place was so awesome and compelling that I felt presumptuous—ashamed. The stifling, brooding silence seemed to flow down on me like a tangible wave, humbling me, dwarfing me.

"I spent my first two days in a superficial exploration of the palace and city, wandering through the miles of crumbling streets and fallen buildings. But I pass over that to the third day, when I started my examination of Angkor Wat. All of that

day I spent in the temple, alone, for the natives feared to venture into it. Along its marching walls life-sized figures were carved in exquisite relief, warriors, kings and elephants, battles and ceremonies, literally miles of lavished, delicate sculptures. I lingered with them, absorbed, until the sun had set and the swift tropical darkness was descending, then abruptly came to a realization of my surroundings and started for my camp.

"Through the deepening shadows of the temple's halls I went, stumbling here and there against fallen stones, and finally came with a slight sensation of relief to the stone-paved courtyard in front of the edifice, from which the great causeway led back to the city and to my camp. It was quite dark, now, but I stopped for a moment there, since the moon was just rising and the scene was one of perfect beauty—the calm moonlight flooding over the silent ruins, the dark, looming walls behind me, the black shadows that lay across the silver-lit courtyard. For minutes I stood there, fascinated, but finally turned to go.

"I walked across the courtyard, then stopped abruptly and looked up. A strange sound had come to my ears from above, a sound that was like distant, shrill whistling. It hung for a moment, faint and eerie, then grew much louder, like a score of men whistling piercingly in different keys, varied, tumultuous. I half expected to see birds passing above, but there were none. The air had been heavy and still for hours, but now a puff of wind smote me, a little, buffeting breeze that changed suddenly to a hard wind and then to a raging gale that whipped the sun-helmet off my head and nearly twisted me from my feet. And with that sudden change, the whistling chorus above had

changed also, had waxed to a raging tumult of wind-shrieks, piercing, tempestuous! Abruptly, now, there flashed into being in the air forty feet above me—a thing!

"It was a swirling mass of dense gray vapor, looking in the moonlight much like a drifting cloud of steam. But this smoky mass was alive with motion of its own, spinning and interlacing, and from it came the shrill chorus and the raging winds. And, too, I saw that somewhere inside those shifting mists glowed three little circles of green light, one set above the other two, three tiny, radiant orbs whose brilliance stood out even in the mellow moonlight.

"Abruptly, as I stared up at the thing, those three circles of vivid green luminescence changed to purple, no less brilliant. And at the same instant, there came a change to the spinning mists around them. Those mists seemed to contract, to shrink, to solidify, and then they had vanished and in place of them hung a thing of solid matter, a mass of what seemed to be gray, resilient flesh, and at the center of which hung steadily the little triangle of purple lights. Nor was this solid mass any more unchanging than the misty one had been, for it seemed to have no one form, flashing with incredible speed through a myriad half-glimpsed shapes. It folded and unfolded, contracted, elongated, spun and writhed, a protean changing of shapes that my eyes could scarcely follow. But always the three little orbs of purple hung unchanged at its center.

"Scarcely more than a minute had elapsed since the thing first had appeared above me, and now as I gazed up at it, stupefied, I sensed dimly that the whistling sounds and the winds had died away. Then, before my dazed mind could fully

comprehend the strangeness of the creature that hung in the air above me, that creature floated swiftly down beside me, so near that I could have touched it. And out from the changing, inchoate mass of it reached a long, twisting tentacle, straight toward me!

"I staggered weakly back, and screamed. But that arm circled and gripped me, then pulled me in toward the central mass of the thing. It was cold to the touch, an utter, numbing cold, like the chill of something from outer space, utterly alien to our earth and life. That cold shock stabbed through me and paralyzed me, and I dangled helplessly in the thing's grip, while at its center, seen, somehow, *through* the mass of the thing, the triangle of purple orbs seemed to watch me.

"All this had been enacted in a few moments, and now the inexplicable thing that held me began to rise again, to float up some distance above the ground. It still gripped me tightly, and now the purple orbs changed again to brilliant green, while again the solid, twisting mass of the thing changed, expanding and swirling, until it was again the drifting, spinning mass of vapor which I had first glimpsed. I floated in those mists, gripped as tightly as ever by their unseen holds, and now began again the shrill, piercing whistling, from all around me, while a rising torrent of wind roared around the thing that held me.

"At the same time, glancing up, I saw the moon racing across the sky above with incredible speed, bounding across the zenith like a shooting star and sinking down in the west. Hardly had it disappeared when there was an up-gush of gray light from the eastern horizon, and then the sun leapt up, red

and flaming, and hurtled across the sky with even greater speed. I caught a glimpse of Angkor beneath, bathed in tropical sunlight. And a half-minute before it had been deepest night!

"A deadly sickness seized me, and while I strove against it the sun raced down into the west and it was night again, with the shining moon again flashing across the sky with nightmare speed. Again it disappeared and again the sun sprang up and rocketed headlong across the zenith. And for the first time there came to my numbed brain some realization of what was happening.

"This inexplicable thing that held me—this being of changing mists and vapors—was taking me on through time. It was whirling me on into the future, with some undreamed-of power of its own.

"The sun was racing across the sky with comet speed, now, a streak of golden light, and day and night followed each other like the flipped leaves of a book, faster and faster. In a few minutes they had become indistinguishable, had merged into a green twilight in which I could see but dimly the ground below. And even as we thus sped on through time, with ever-increasing speed, the thing that held me began to move through space also, and I caught a glimpse of ruined Angkor sliding away from beneath me.

"The thundering roar of the winds grew even louder as we moved simultaneously through time and space. I caught fragmentary glimpses of land flashing by beneath, with tremendous speed. And all the while I hung there in the grip of the thing, held by the smoky mist-spirals, swinging helplessly

around and around the three circles of radiant green light at the thing's center.

"With a sudden surge of desperate courage, I tried to move in the remorseless grip that prisoned me, endeavored to raise my right hand to my belt, putting all my force into the effort. Slowly my hand came up, inch by inch, struggling against the unseen grip of iron that grasped me. It came up, with infinite slowness, until it was high enough to grasp the automatic in my belt-holster. I clasped the pistol's stock and threw off the safety catch, then, with another great effort, swung up the pistol until it pointed directly at the triangle of radiant orbs, and pulled the trigger.

"The report snapped out thinly above the thundering of the winds. And instantly the grip of the unseen, vaporous arms around me relaxed, releasing me utterly, and I plunged down through space.

"Down I fell, all of a hundred feet, and struck water, sinking down and down into it, ever more slowly, then hurtling up to the surface again, gasping for air. It was night, and above was no sign of the thing that had held me, so I judged that it had gone on into time. The water I swam in was salt, and I knew from the long, easy swells that I was in the open sea. There was no shore in sight, nor any sign of one, so I wasted no effort in swimming but strove only to keep afloat.

"For over two hours I floated, treading water easily, and had just decided that it would be best to give over my useless efforts and sink down to rest and peace, when a spark of light showed on the horizon, a spark too low to be a star. It grew

larger, coming nearer, until I could make it out as one of the upper lights of a ship. In the course it was following, it would pass me at some distance, so I struck out in a direction that would bring me across its path.

"My hours in the water had told on my strength, though, and my progress was so slow that the ship had nearly passed me when I came within hailing distance of it. There were few lights on its decks, and no answer to my frantic cries. But when it had passed a little beyond me, I heard voices shouting and the rattle of a boat's tackle. I knew then that I was saved.

"The ship proved to be an oil-tanker, bound from Hongkong to Galveston. And as I found out, it had picked me up in the open Pacific, at a spot some three hundred miles east of Manila. The thing that held me had carried me that far, in space.

"I represented myself as the sole survivor of a wrecked tramp-steamer, and was not questioned overmuch. I dared not tell my story to those sailors, lest they prison me as a mad-man. I asked them a few discreet questions, though, and received an answer to one that staggered me. For I was no longer in my own year, the year in which I had been seized there at Angkor. I was in a year three years later! Three years! And it had seemed only a few minutes to me. I had been carried on, that far, into time.

"I took my place as one of the crew, on the voyage to Galveston, and worked my passage, though I was hard put to it to uphold my assertion that I was a seaman. We sailed on, forging across the Pacific and heading toward Panama. A night came when we were only a few hundred miles west of the canal. I was

stretched in a forecandle bunk, vainly trying to sleep away the haunting fears that still filled me. The night was quite calm, with only the throb of the engines and the slap of waves on the hull breaking the silence. Then, faint and far, but sounding to me like the thunder of doom, came a distant, eery whistling, a piercing chorus that I knew well.

"It grew, it waxed to a tumult of roaring winds, while I lay crouched in the bunk, trembling. It seemed to swoop down on the deck above, and there rang out a great scream, a shriek of horror that burned into my brain. The roaring winds began to lessen, to draw away. I ran up onto the deck and looked wildly around. To the north, a little above and beyond the ship, was a hazy mass that I glimpsed vaguely in the moonlight, and that suddenly disappeared, still heading straight north. And the whistling chorus of winds died away.

"I sank down on the deck, sick at heart. For I knew what I had seen, knew that half-glimpsed thing to be the thing that had seized me at Angkor, and from which I had freed myself. Two of the watch, the only men on deck at the time, were missing, and all around me the sailors who had poured up onto the deck were speculating as to their disappearance, and the cause of the sudden, roaring winds. But I told them nothing. I knew well that the thing that had snatched me away before had come again to seize me, tracking me down, God knows how, perhaps by some mystic mark or brand that its grip had sealed upon me. I knew that it had come for me, and not finding me, had taken the two men on deck at the time. But I said nothing.

"It was finally agreed by the ship's officers to report the event as the loss of two sailors, swept overboard by a sudden gale. It

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