

From the Podcast Forgotten Sci-Fi

by Craig Patterson

The Time Eliminator

Kaw

Hamilton Fish Errell, or "Fish" Errell, as he was known at Yale, contemplated the product of his genius with elation, not unmixed with awe. The machine stood on a solid block of transparent glass and resembled somewhat a modern radio cabinet combined with a motion picture machine. Across the face of the cabinet were three dials, but here the resemblance to radio reception ceased, for these dials bore the legends "Longitude," "Latitude" and "Altitude" respectively. A fourth dial, perhaps eight inches in diameter, was located above the others and this one bore the inscription "Time-Space."

Within was a bewildering array of tubes, wires and lamps and in front of all these, a curious arrangement of revolving mirrors, the speed of which was controlled by a knob at the right of the cabinet. One pair of wires connected the cabinet with a small dynamo, while a second set led to a 100-foot aerial pole outside the house itself.

It was while in his senior year at Yale that Errell's researches into the strange relationship existing between light and electricity attracted so much attention. Indeed he was in a fair way of becoming a celebrity when he suddenly dropped from public view and betook himself to a secluded village called Arshamomoque, at the eastern end of Long Island, where the Errell family maintained a Summer residence.

The house itself, known locally as "The Mansion," stood on a hill overlooking the Sound, but sufficiently back from the highway to insure a desirable degree of privacy. A spacious tower, originally designed for an observatory, had been converted into a research laboratory and here, surrounded by the most modern apparatus, young Errell worked feverishly on his new invention, — an invention which, even in its unfinished condition, had already produced results so far-reaching in their consequences and so revolutionary from a scientific point of view, that at times the young man almost questioned his own sanity.

A Wonderful Projecting Machine

And now the machine was completed. The young inventor straightened up, took a deep breath and reached for a cigar. As he did so, the word "Havana" popped into his mind.

"Well, why not?" he queried. "I'll try Havana for my first real test and see how the ponies are running today.:"

Whereupon he consulted a map, noted the longitude and latitude of that city and twirled the dials of the cabinet to correspond. Then looking at his watch, which showed 3 p.m., he adjusted the upper dial to 2:30 o'clock, the corresponding time for Havana.

A moment's hesitation, and then he reached over and threw a little switch, at the same time placing his other hand on the knob that controlled the revolving mirrors. A faint buzz and then a stream of light from the cabinet illumined a white screen on the opposite wall.

At first there was but a confused blur, but as he slowly turned the knob backward and forward this presently crystallized into a panoramic view of the Havana race-track, revealing the grandstand thronged with wildly excited spectators and three foam-specked horses tearing down the home stretch almost neck and neck.

Even as Errell watched, they flashed over the line and a moment later the name of the winner, "Muchacho," appeared on the bulletin board.

"Hot stuff!" he commented. "Now for the next test."

Slowly, almost solemnly, he turned the upper dial to the left, — five, ten, fifteen, twenty notches.

"That should be the year 1906," he said, "the year of the great earthquake at San Francisco."

Consulting his map again, he adjusted the lower dials, allowing 100 feet for altitude, and again threw the switch.

As before, the picture first appeared as an indistinguishable blur, and then it changed gradually to a clearly-defined birdseye view of the stricken city. And now he could behold great buildings come crashing down, throngs of panic-stricken citizens scurrying through the streets in wild disorder, with here and there the smoke of incipient fires.

For some time he watched the awe-inspiring spectacle, then threw the cut-out switch and reset the dials.

"Now I'll try for 'distance,' as the radio fans would put it," he chuckled, jubilant over his success thus far.

Seeing St. Joan of Arc

Reaching up, he twirled the top dial rapidly to the left, with reckless disregard of this annihilation of time and space, until the indicator registered the year 1428!

"This should convince the most skeptical," he said. "I'll take a peek at France in those bygone days."

He thereupon computed carefully the location of the city of Orleans made the proper adjustments on the lower dials. Then, confident but deeply impressed at the thought of what was to come, he once more threw the switch and regulated the speed of the revolving mirrors until the pictures on the screen synchronized with the actual event.

"My God! It's Joan of Arc!" he cried, as across the silver screen in serried ranks, swept the attacking army at the siege of Orleans'. At their head, clad in brightly shining armor, flashing sword uplifted and a look of exaltation on her face, rode the Warrior Maid!

Minute after minute he sat there with bated breath, — tremulous with excitement, awed and yet elated. And then, as he was resetting the dials, a thought came into his mind that sobered him with a jolt. Ten minutes later he was speeding towards New York in his big Mercer.

At precisely 5 p.m. he was shown into the private office of Brig. General Humiston, commanding the new secret intelligence department of the Washing- ton government.

Brig.-General Humiston and His Daughter

Not only the General but, unknown to him, his daughter also, had long taken a deep interest in young Errell, the latter's father and the General having been classmates at West Point. This interest was fully reciprocated, especially in the case of the daughter, — a vivacious exponent of the younger set.

But it was in his capacity as a government official that Errell had called on General Humiston, having determined to proffer his services and the services of his invention as well to the country of his birth.

"Well, my boy," boomed the gruff old soldier, "What's on your mind? And why haven't you been to see us for so long? Jerry thinks you have forgotten her entirely."

"General," broke in the young man, ignoring his inquiry, "can you jump into my car and come down to my place on Long Island at once? I have something to show you, something so breath-taking in its possibilities and of such tremendous importance to your department that every moment counts."

"Are you in earnest?" demanded the General, sitting up with a jerk. "You want me to break a theatre engagement with Jerry and go with you now?"

"Precisely that," replied Errell gravely; then, hopefully: "Why not bring Jerry with you?"

"Call at the Biltmore in one hour," was the reply in curt, military tones. "One or both of us will be ready to go with you."

Errell's hand went up in salute, he turned smartly on his heel and left the room.

Promptly on the hour, the General appeared at the motor entrance of the hotel, followed closely by Jerry, — bewitching in rich furs and silken coat. Errell's heart thumped riotously as he leaped from the car and met her with outstretched hands.

"Oh Jerry," he cried, "It's good to see you," and his eyes fully confirmed the words.

"I'm from Missouri," was that young person's flippant reply, but the words could not disguise the wonderful glow of happiness that irradiated the lovely little face.

Once out of the city, the big car sped down the island, roaring past sleepy farms and villages as it tore through the night, and as the clock struck 9 they drew up at the Errell doorstep.

Little was said on the outward trip, but once inside the house the General asked:

"Now, Errell, what's it all about? I hope you haven't dragged me down here on a wild goose chase."

"Come up to my laboratory," was Errell's reply. He waited a second, then added: "You too, Jerry." She gave him a quick glance of appreciation.

Explanation of the Invention

A moment more and they were in the laboratory, Jerry and her father looking with frank curiosity at the mysterious cabinet.

"General, and you too, Jerry," began Errell very soberly. "What I am about to show you is something so fantastic, so weird, so utterly removed from all human experience, that before proceeding further I feel I should prepare your minds for what you are to behold. Please be seated and follow closely." He paused, then went on:

"When the dynamo at a power-house breaks down, every trolley car on that system stops and the electricity in the overhead wire and in the dynamo itself disappears, — swallowed up in the earth's general store of electric force. Unless this electricity can be made to reappear, by starting up the dynamo again, street-car service on that system is a thing of the past. This is obvious. Now for the next step:

"You know how moving pictures are made, with a blasé photographer turning a crank while the villain chokes the heroine. Once the lights are switched off, however, the scene has passed into oblivion, — unless or until it is resurrected by projecting the film on to a screen. What few people realize, is that every event on this earth leaves a record in light rays, whether or not a human photographer is present to snap the picture.

"In other words, light rays persist, or endure, since nothing is lost in Nature. To illustrate: Through the medium of a powerful telescope we are now able to get a view of celestial bodies which, without the aid of this instrument, would necessitate a journey of years in their direction in order to obtain a corresponding view. If a cataclysm should destroy the Martian canals today and we should travel towards that planet in a projectile at the rate of a mile a minute, it would take years ere we reached a point, in space where the event would become visible to our eyes; or, if we elected to remain here, it would take just that much longer before the event would appear to the inhabitants of this sphere.

"Again, consider the curious paradox presented last New Year's eve, when couples in London danced by radio during the last moments of 1925 to music played in Berlin in 1926, and then, a few moments later, danced in 1926 to music being played in New York in 1925. An evening paper in San Francisco might truthfully have stated on December 31st: 'The West End club of London danced the old year out at 4

o'clock this afternoon,' while a London paper on the morning of January 1st might with equal truth have announced: 'The Waikiki club of Honolulu will dance the New Year in at 10:30 o'clock this forenoon.*

Time is a Measure of Space

"From this you can readily comprehend that Time is but a measure of space. Now for the final step:

"In order to reproduce a past scene in Nature, two problems arise: First, that of reproducing the light rays in their proper sequence. As I stated before, nothing is lost in Nature, although it may change its form. So, just as electricity can be made to manifest itself again after disappearing, so also can light rays, which persist, be made to reappear, although no longer visible to the eye. It is not essential that the identical light rays of the former scene be brought back; only that the rays shall appear in their former sequence and intensities. If you strike a church bell and repeat the blow ten years later, you reproduce the tone of that bell perfectly, although you do not get the original sound wave.

Projecting the General's Last Sunday's Ride

"The second problem, — that of correlating the present position of this earth with the exact position in space which it occupied at the instant the event actually happened, — is more complex, involving as it does intricate problems in geometry, gravitational force, relativity, the earth's movement through space and other factors too complicated for the lay mind."

Errell waited a moment, to give his hearers time to grasp the significance of this last statement, then resumed:

"These problems, General, have been solved in the machine before you, as I shall now proceed to demonstrate. Where were you on Sunday morning at 9 o'clock?"

"I was out for a morning canter in Rock Creek Park, Washington," replied General Humiston, impressed in spite of himself.

"Watch the screen in front of you," commanded Errell, meanwhile adjusting the dials of the cabinet.

A subdued buzzing noise, and then before the astonished gaze of the General and his daughter there unrolled a panorama of the City of Magnificent Distances, converging presently on the bridle path in Rock Creek park. A moment later the figure of General Humiston, mounted on his big grey charger, came galloping into view.

The Most Secret Plans An Open Book

"My God!" exclaimed that doughty soldier, springing to his feet. "Do you realize, boy, what this invention would mean to your government? Why, the most secret plans of an enemy would be an open book to us."

"It was for just that reason that I have brought you here," replied the young man, gravely. "Before we go further into that, however, is there anything of special interest to your department right now that you would like to know?"

"You couldn't tell me, could you," asked the General, stepping nearer in his excitement, "just who were present at a secret conference at Fontainebleau last Tuesday at 10 a.m.?"

"Just a moment," cautioned Errell, as he readjusted the dials and made the proper allowance for time and distance. "Now watch the screen."

Again a faint buzzing noise, then the light flashed on and first came the Eiffel tower into view, with its flaring automobile advertisement, and then Fontainebleau. Even as they watched, a closed car drove up and the French Minister of Commerce alighted and disappeared within the building. Then came the English Secretary of Commerce and Italy's representative, followed a moment later by the Russian Commissioner. Promptly on the hour the German Minister of Trade and Industries drove up and joined the others.

Errell glanced at the General, who was trembling with eagerness, exultation and almost with fear.

"Yes," he muttered audibly, "they are all there; I know every one of them," He was silent a moment.

"I presume you have an inkling of what this conference means, Errell. The idea is for each government here represented to control some commodity that is absolutely essential to American industry and then to boost the price to a figure so prohibitive as to provoke reprisals. These will then be seized upon as a pretext for the breaking of treaties; the next step is a world war against the United States — our tremendous store of gold the main objective."

"But it takes money to finance a war these days," objected Errell.

"Precisely, and therein is our strongest defense," was the answer. "With foreknowledge of what is contemplated, our bankers can shut down on further loans abroad and curtail European credits. This machine will enable us to prepare for any contingency; by revealing every plan of the enemy, we can make this country practically impregnable."

"That is just it," replied Errell.

"The first thing," broke in the General, "is to safeguard your discovery. Should but a whisper of what you have accomplished get abroad, your life would not be worth a candle."

"I have thought of that," said the younger man, "and for greater secrecy I think the machine should be kept here, rather than in Washington where inevitably there would be a leak sooner or later. You could run down here for frequent visits."

"Yes, but I would have to have a very plausible reason for those visits," interposed the General.

The Apparatus Wins the Bride

"Well," — and here Errell paused and glanced at Jerry, who nodded brightly, — "why not spend your week-ends here with Jerry and your new son-in-law? We expect to be married in June."

"What? What's that?" shouted the old General, "Jerry your wife! How do you get that way, young man?" and he tried to look very stern. 'In my day," he added virtuously, "it was customary for the young lady's parents to be consulted."

"Um-m," mused Errell. "Would you mind telling me in what year you were married?"

"I know!" cried Jerry, delightedly. "They were married in Greenwich, Connecticut, just 22 years ago today, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon."

"Hey! Wait a minute," exclaimed her father, in evident confusion, as Errell stepped to the little cabinet, but he was too late. Already the machine had given its preliminary buzz and the next moment they beheld a little two-seated Ford, 1904 model, bumping and swaying along the Boston Post road just west of the state line. Perhaps half a mile behind them came a horse and buggy, the irate driver lashing his foam-flecked steed in a vain attempt to overtake the fleeing couple in the car.

Errell glanced at Jerry, then at her father, and back to the picture. There could be no mistake! The girl in the little Ford might have been Jerry herself, save for the difference in dress, while the handsome young chap at her side, his eyes glued to the road, bore a resemblance to her father so striking as to dispel any doubt of his identity.

"You win!" laughed the General, wiping his eyes. "Take her, my boy, and may you be as happy as we were."