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AN ABOUT
ME
BY KELVIN
ENT

FEATURING
**THE WORLDS OF
TOMORROW**

An Amazing Complete Novel
By **MANLY
WADE WELLMAN**



WATERS OF WRATH

Startling Novellet

BY **ARTHUR K. BARNES**

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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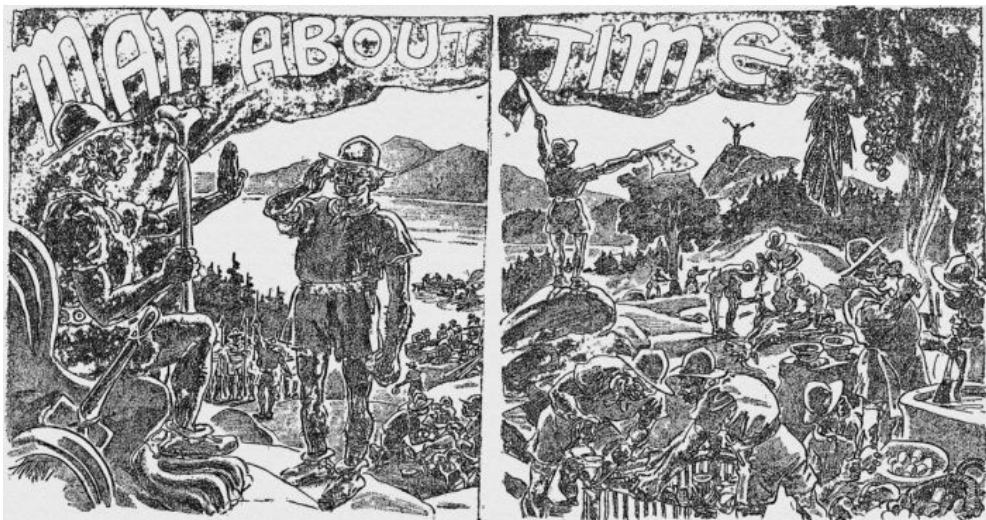
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Pete Manx had certainly brought about a radical change in the prehistoric camp!

MAN ABOUT TIME

A Complete Pete Manx Novelet

By

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym Kelvin Kent.

Author of "Science is Golden," "Knight Must Fall," etc.

Illustrations by H. W. Wesso.

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, October 1940.

Piltdown Pete Chisels a Page from Stone-Age History When He Breaks the Chain of the Centuries—and Finds the Missing Link!

CHAPTER I

Manx Thinks

Pete Manx had an idea. He sat in the laboratory of his friend Dr. Horatio Mayhem and deftly tossed his derby in the general direction of a rheostat. There was a crackling outburst of blue sparks, and Mayhem's lean, storklike figure was galvanized into frantic activity. He hastily removed the derby and gave it back to Pete.

"Never do that," he told the squat little ex-barker reprovingly. "I'm using a lot of high voltage around here."

Manx looked uncomfortable for a moment. His brother-in-law had met a not entirely unexpected end as a result of a current of high voltage electricity. Pete glanced apprehensively at his chair, but relaxed when he failed to discover any suspicious looking wires connected with it.

"Okay, Doc," he said. "Unlax. Take it easy. I got a proposition."

Mayhem started slightly. He had been involved in Pete's propositions before. He still remembered with horror the murderous proclivities of the racketeer "Mile-away" Moratti. He had come to the disheartening conclusion that Pete Manx was a trouble conductor.

"Why don't you go away?" he asked, rather plaintively. "I'm in the middle of an important experiment."

"Yeah?"

Impressed, Pete looked around. He saw nothing but the usual chaotic labyrinth of apparatus. A guinea-pig, in a cage, was regarding him with baleful intentness. Otherwise, all was quite the same as usual.

Mayhem beamed, however. He pointed with pride to the guinea-pig.

"I'm testing his synapses," he explained. "And his." He pointed to a rabbit that was calmly devouring a portion of lettuce in a corner. "I'm trying to create an electrical stop-gap to nerve-impulses that will induce temporary paralysis."

Pete ignored him with his usual scientific detachment.

"I want to bet my roll on Pick-me-up," the ex-barker stated. "He just won the Kentucky Derby." He drew a newspaper from his pocket and indicated the headline. "See? A sixty-to-one shot."

"The laws of chance," Mayhem remarked, his eyes growing bright with interest, "are most fascinating. Especially when you consider Planck's constant and the Heisenberg uncertainty factor." Then he noticed the date of the paper. His eyes dulled again. "But the creature, Pick-me-up, has already won the Kentucky Derby. I can't see how you can expect to find someone who will take your wager."

"That's where you come in!" Pete was beaming now. He straightened his red-and-green plaid necktie, lit a cigar, and aimed it at Mayhem. "If I'd known yesterday that Pick-me-up was the winner, I could have cleaned up. See?"

"You didn't know, though."

"There's the answer," Pete grinned, pointing at a chair that bore a discomfiting resemblance to an electric seat. "Your time machine!"

Mayhem's lips compressed with prim annoyance.

“How often must I tell you that there’s no such thing? Time travel is impossible. My device simply liberates the ego—the consciousness—and sends it into the central time-hub, about which time itself revolves. Time is like a closed circle, a wheel. At present we’re existing at a certain point on the circumference. If we can take a short cut through the diameter of the wheel, we can enter another time sector. You should know that.”

“Yeah, Doc, I know. I oughta. I been back to Rome, Egypt, and twice to England. Robin Hood, Cheops, King Arthur, Claudius—I had my fill of that kind of stuff.”

Mayhem was scarcely listening.

“What happens, of course, is that your consciousness enters another time sector. Automatically it enters the mind and body of someone who is existing at that particular moment. If you went back to the fifteenth century, you might find yourself existing as Columbus, King Ferdinand, or a savage in the Caribbean.”

“No, thanks,” Pete said. He shuddered feelingly. “Just forget about shooting me all the way back there. I want you to send me back just one day. Yesterday. So I can lay a bet on Pick-me-up and collect it when I get back to now.”



PETE MANX

“What?” Mayhem’s jaw dropped. “Yesterday! But—but you were alive then!”

“So what?”

“It isn’t possible! It’s a paradox. There couldn’t possibly be two Pete Manxes—”

“Thanks,” said Pete, pleased by the compliment.

Mayhem went on unheedingly.

“And you can’t change a known and immutable past. You didn’t bet on Pick-me-up yesterday, and that’s that.”

Mayhem turned suddenly. A huge, pompous man had entered the lab. It was Professor Aker, Pete’s archenemy, with whom he had quarreled in a multitude of historical eras. Aker glared at Pete through his pince-nez.

“Well, what is it now?” he boomed. “What does this moron want?”

“Hey!” Pete said resentfully. “I know what that means. Don’t think I got no education at all, fat stuff.”

“Quiet,” Mayhem commanded, and turned to the professor. Quickly he explained Pete’s desires. Aker nodded thoughtfully.

“An interesting experiment. Why not try it, Mayhem? After all, what can you lose? He’s no use to anybody while he’s alive, anyhow.”

Pete swore somewhat anxiously under his breath.

“I’ll take my chances,” he grunted. “Sixty-to-one on Pick-me-up is plenty good odds. I’ll take a chance like that any day.”

He went over to the electrified chair and sat down in it. Doctor Mayhem turned to his control board.

“This won’t take long,” he said. “Er—Professor Aker, I expected you yesterday to help me with my synapse experiments. What happened?”

Aker frowned. “I really can’t say. A touch of sun, perhaps, or something rather like amnesia. I’m probably getting absent-minded, but for the life of me I can’t remember what I did yesterday morning. It—”

“Come on,” Pete broke in impatiently. “Let ’er roll.”

Mayhem obediently let her roll. He pushed buttons and twirled levers. Things began to revolve and spit sparks. The physicist began to look worried.

“Funny,” he murmured. “There’s something wrong. I believe I actually need more power.”

“Feed her more juice, Doc,” Manx urged, gnawing his cigar. He pushed the white rabbit away from his feet. “Scram, stupid.”

The beast hopped away, paused, and returned to sniff at Pete’s green socks. Mayhem generously applied more current. A low hum of restrained power throbbled through the room.

“This is almost the limit,” he said. “If—” He pushed a lever further over.

Crash! Lightning struck, with raving white flames. The room rocked and jarred under the terrific impact. For a second Mayhem and Aker were blinded. Then, as light and sound died, they saw again through blinking eyes.

“Pete!” Mayhem’s voice was frightened. He stared at the limp figure of Mr. Manx, slumped laxly in the chair.

“He’s all right,” Aker reassured, pointing toward a dial. “Only—Jumping Jupiter, look at that! You used too much power, Mayhem!”

The physicist took one look and clapped his hand to his brow.

“Good Lord, look at the instruments! I’ve sent Pete back beyond Egypt or even Sumeria! *He’s in the prehistoric past!*”

“So is the rabbit,” Aker gasped. “It was touching Manx when the juice went on, and the current was transmitted to its body. The rabbit’s ego is back in prehistoric times, too!”

It was true. Both Manx and the rabbit were utterly relaxed. The casual observer would have lost his casualness and called them dead. They were not, of course, as Mayhem realized.

But matters were still far from satisfactory.

The delicate transformers, overburdened by the current, had burned out. Dr. Mayhem reeled slightly.

“It’ll take hours—maybe longer—to fix the machine. How can Pete survive in such a savage environment?”

Aker grinned nastily.

“I shouldn’t worry about that if I were you. Don’t forget, he’ll be occupying the body of a savage himself.”

“That’s true,” said Mayhem. He blinked in dismay as a startling thought struck him. “And so will the rabbit!”

CHAPTER II

Manx Goes a Way Back

A taloned, furry claw was approaching the nose of Mr. Manx. Pete stared up with bulging eyes. He tried to lift his hand to shut out the sight of the horrid thing, but it seemed impossible. Beyond the claw he could see tree-tops and a blue sky. Apparently he was lying on his back, and a disembodied talon was about to clutch him by the face. Mr. Manx found his voice.

“No!” he babbled. “Don’t! I’m too young to die! *Yah!*”

The claw had flattened itself over Pete’s eyes. Yelping, he lifted his left hand and pulled it away. Once more he could see, but he rather regretted it.

There were two claws now. One was clutching the other by the wrist.

“I knew it,” Pete said with conviction. “I’ve gone batty.”

He realized abruptly that he wasn’t talking English. The time machine, of course, enabled Pete to take over the memories of the body he was occupying, as far as language was concerned. In Egypt he had spoken Egyptian, Latin in Rome, and so on. But this tongue was unique. It sounded like a dog fight. Grunts, groans and cackles barked from his throat in an off-key cacophony.

Worst of all, perhaps, was Pete’s sudden discovery that the two claws were his own.

He rose weakly and looked around. He was in a leafy forest, with towering trunks overgrown with lichen. Gigantic ferns were all around him. Water poured tricklingly from something nearby.

Realizing that he was tremendously thirsty, Pete staggered toward the sound. He came out beside a little brook pool. He flung himself down and drank thirstily. Then he happened to glance at his image. He drew back slightly, paused, staring. A long, quavering moan issued from Pete’s thick, jutting lips.

“Oh-h-h-h-h!” he gurgled. “It’s that cockeyed time machine. I ain’t nuts. I’m a monkey!”

This was not quite accurate. Pete wasn’t as handsome as a Cro-Magnon, nor was he as brutish in appearance as a Neanderthaler. His forehead was low, and beetling brows thrust out like hairy awnings over his savage little eyes. His nose was a mere lump like a Brussel sprout, his fanged mouth made up for it in size. Pete was distressed to note that he was slobbering.

“I ain’t neat,” he groaned, gaping down at his shaggy body. His clothing consisted of the skin of some beast tied becomingly about his wide middle. It was there merely for the sake of fashion. Pete’s furry figure didn’t really need it.

A hoarse panting caught his attention. He couldn’t have missed it. Manx glanced over one furry shoulder. He was appalled to discover a tiger lurking right behind him.

It was distressingly large, and had teeth like sabers, Pete thought with unconscious accuracy. It was, in fact, a saber-tooth. Its tail was twitching significantly as it crouched lower.

“Beware, Ulg!” a voice shrilled from somewhere in the forest. “Behind you—the striped death!”

The tiger’s tail stiffened, and Pete, frozen with horror, gasped weakly. He saw the glaring amber eyes intent on him. A thread of saliva hung from the sharp-fanged mouth.

The monster coughed—and charged!

Pete was crouched on hands and knees beside the pool. He acted almost instinctively. There was no time to escape, so he simply turned a somersault and fell into the pool.

Luckily it was deep, and Pete struck out desperately under water for the other side. His skin crawled with the expectation of vicious claws. If the tiger could swim, Pete Manx was sunk in more ways than one.

He came up sputtering, risked a glance over his hairy shoulder. The big cat had paused at the pool's edge, and was snarling. It tentatively dipped a paw into the water and then drew back. Suddenly it made up its mind. It hurled itself after Pete.

But by this time Manx had reached the other side. He scrambled forward, his eyes searching desperately for a refuge. He could see only the trees, and the great ferns.

The voice from the forest came again, shrilly.

"Climb, Ulg!" it warned. "Climb the tree!"

That sounded like good advice. Pete had never been an acrobat, but his new body was unexpectedly agile. He went up a trunk like a monkey—a simile which struck too close to home to be entirely pleasant. At a safe height he paused. Clinging to a branch, he looked down.

The saber-tooth was pacing around the bole, spitting and snarling, staring up with hunger in its baleful amber eyes. Pete relaxed. In a low, fervent voice he told the tiger what he thought of it.

Leaves rustled. A gray, shaggy figure swung down from above and clung beside Pete. A face almost identical with his own twisted into what was apparently meant to be a friendly grimace. Manx drew back involuntarily.

"That was close," the newcomer observed. "I thought he had you. You're not usually careless, Ulg."

Pete thought fast. He was, it seemed, inhabiting the body of a prehistoric man named Ulg. By this time Manx had a reasonably good idea that he had gone pretty far back in time.

Obviously something had gone wrong, as usual, with Mayhem's time machine. The physicist would eventually repair it and rescue Pete. But in the meantime, he would have to walk warily. The first thing was to find out the whole setup—just who Ulg was.

"What now?" Pete asked cleverly.

"I came to tell you that the chief, your uncle Burl, has gone mad," said the newcomer. "He hops and eats ferns, and squeaks at us when we approach him. You must come back to the caves and fight Grul."

Pete strove to figure it out for himself.

"Oh," he said slowly. "Grul wants to fight me? Why?"

"If Burl is mad, he cannot be the chief. You have always said you would be the next chief, and would kill anybody who opposed your rule. Grul says he wants to be chief, so—" The furry shoulders moved in an expressive shrug.

"Grul can be chief, if he wants," Pete said hastily. "Politics is out of my line."

"But Grul wants to kill you, anyway. He does not like you since you tore his left ear off three moons ago. He sent me, Shak, to find you."

"Thanks," Pete responded, "but I don't think I'll go back to the caves, Shak. I'll just hang around here for awhile. Can you imagine a guy getting sore at me for a little thing like that?"

But he knew that was just bravado. Ulg must have been some sweet kid! How many enemies would he have in camp?

“No man can live in the jungle at night,” Shak said, with a shake of his head. “You know that. It’s certain death. Only in the caves are we safe. Come back and kill Grul and then we can have dinner if I can find a rat or two.”

Manx found himself disliking his bird-brained companion. Shak was entirely too naive. He scratched his flank contemplatively and found a flea. He considered it with some interest, and then ate it, after politely offering it to Pete and meeting with abrupt refusal.

The definitely ex-barker considered. After further questioning, he realized that Shak was correct. To remain in the forest after dark would certainly be fatal. The ferocious carnivores that roamed by night couldn’t be ignored. Unless Pete returned to the caves, his doom was sealed.

“Like a blackout in Hell’s Kitchen,” he moaned. “Just the same, I’d take my chances here if only I had a typewriter.”

“Typ-rhyyder?”

“Gat. Tommy-gun. The things that bring Frank Buck back alive.”

“You,” said Shak solemnly, “are mad, like your uncle. You say strange words.”

Pete grunted. He was thinking deeply. The setup, after all, wasn’t so bad. He felt firm confidence in himself and in his ability to talk with glib effect. Grul was probably just an overgrown monkey, anyway. He could be oiled along—that is, if he really was as dumb as Shak, who was now engrossed in nibbling aimlessly on his toes.

“Come on,” Manx urged. “The tiger’s gone. Let’s pick ’em up, pal.”

This utterly confused Shak for a time, but at last he understood. Together the pair climbed down and set off through the primordial forest.

It was an eerie place. Strange noises were continually heard. The jungle abounded with life. Huge, lovely butterflies hovered over bushes that were like nothing he had ever seen. Incredibly large dragon-flies darted here and there. That was where Johnny Weissmuller would have felt quite at home, Pete decided. He was interested in the fact that there were no flowers in evidence, though he didn’t know why.

It was the Age of Mammals. The Carboniferous Era had passed into unwritten history, and the great reptiles were long since dead. As time goes, Pete had not gone very far into the past—merely to the dawn of intelligence in anthropoid mammals. But at the moment he felt billions of light years away from Times Square and the comfortable tumult of Broadway.

The two emerged from the forest and faced a rising slope, ending at the base of a steep cliff that was pitted with black cave-mouths. A group of shaggy figures were gathered about a fire some distance away. Shak led Pete toward the flames.

“Look,” he said, pointing. “Your Uncle Burl. He is mad.”

Burl was the largest man Pete had ever seen. He was all hair, muscle, height and breadth, with a displacement like the *Queen Mary*. The monstrous form squatted beside a clump of ferns not far away.

Abruptly Burl looked up. He squeaked and moved with extraordinary hops around to the other side of the ferns. Pete’s jaw dropped as he remembered something.

“Oh-oh!” he whispered. “That rabbit back in the doc’s lab! I’ll bet that rabbit’s ego is in Burl’s body.”

Pete’s shrewd guess was correct. The former chief of the tribe was now nibbling ferns and twitching his nose nervously.

“Come along,” Shak urged.

They went toward the fire. Those around the blaze looked up at the newcomers.

One man rose—a huge, barrel-chested giant, only slightly smaller than Burl, the former chief. He was entirely covered with reddish hair. One of his ears, Pete noticed, was missing.

Manx gulped and quickly pretended to be clearing his throat. He smiled placatingly as he moved forward, Grul didn't look any too smart. He just stood there, blinking little reddish eyes, with his mouth open. Pete waved his furry hand amiably.

“Hiya,” he said in a tight voice.

“*Nrgh!*” Grul responded. “I kill!”

He plunged toward Manx, who let out a shrill cry and hurriedly scrambled out of the way. There was a flat-topped boulder conveniently near. Pete sprang to its summit. There he paused, staring around nervously. Apelike faces watched him with casual interest. Grul walked forward, gritting his teeth loudly.

“Now hold on!” Pete said loudly, making a few quick passes in the air. The tribe stared. Grul hesitated and mumbled something murderous.

“I kill—”

“Just a minute!” Pete went into a barber's spiel by force of habit. He bent, clutched at the ground, and brought up a clenched fist, holding it high. “Ladies and missing links! I invite your attention. I have a message of vital import to man and—er—beast.”

Pete paused anxiously, but nobody seemed insulted. Grul was glaring, open-mouthed, baffled.

“Now look, pals.” Pete's voice became softly ingratiating. “I ain't trying to sell you something. I'm trying to help you—all of you.” He eyed his clenched fist and opened it suddenly, to reveal nothing. “See that, folks? Nothing at all! That shows it's easy to trick people, just like you were fooled, Grul, old boy. You thought I didn't like you, eh? Now look, pal, I just want to show you how wrong you were.”

“Hah!” Grul remarked. “All the shes like you. They do not like me. I kill.”

He extended unpleasantly long fingers toward Pete, who shrank back in terror. Abruptly he felt something being pressed into his hand. Looking down, he saw that Shak had surreptitiously slipped him a sharp little knife chipped from flint. An idea sprang full-blown into Pete's mind.

“Hold on!” he yelled. “Listen, Grul, you got the wrong slant altogether. The whole trouble”—he pointed to the giant's crop of bristling beard—“is there. Dames don't like whiskers. They hide your beauty. Back where I come from—uh—I mean there's a famous poem illustrating the point. ‘Never let your whiskers wave. Shave 'em off with Flint-o-shave.’” Pete improvised hurriedly. He threw all his persuasive ability into the argument. “It's painless, too. You've got a Barrymore profile—but nobody can see your mug behind that bush. Just let me demonstrate—”

CHAPTER III

The Hottest Climate Yet

Grul was tempted and fell. He sat down nervously on the rock. Growling under his breath, he watched suspiciously as Pete smeared bear grease and water on the red beard and gingerly applied the knife. Gradually half of Grul's face emerged from the underbrush. Pete kept up a running comment designed to distract his patient's attention.

"See how simple it is, pal? How'dya expect to get sun-tanned unless you shave? See how you look now—a ringer for King Kong. One of the handsomest guys I know," Pete amended, and shaved away with greater confidence. "Facial, massage, shampoo—Boy, all you'll need is a manicure. Just—"

At that moment the blow fell. Pete had grown much too confident for his meager skill. The sharp flint sliced neatly through the red hair. But it continued from there, and went on to slice a good-sized hunk of epidermis from Grul's jutting jaw.

Half-shaved, Grul stood up and batted Pete over the head with a hamlike fist. The clout knocked Manx end over end. Before he could scramble to his feet, Grul was swarming all over him.

"Help!" Pete squawked, striving to keep his opponent's teeth from his throat. "You can't do this! It's illegal!"

"I kill!" Grul snarled, and did his best to make good the threat.

Pete frantically kicked the red giant in the stomach, whereupon Grul seized a large rock and beat his barber over the head with it. The world started to spin around. . . .

Pete let himself go limp, playing possum. Through narrowed eyes he watched the brutal face of Grul twist into a frown. The giant hesitated, drew back. Pete's muscles tensed.

"He lives!" somebody said. "Will you kill him now?"

"No," Grul refuted. "Tonight we shall cook and eat him. Till then—" The cave man moved swiftly.

"Hey!" Pete gulped.

He said no more, for a rock bounced off his skull, and the lights went out for Mr. Manx.

He woke up in approximately the same position. Shak was squatting on his haunches, devouring part of an auroch. He grinned toothily at Pete.

"Ow, my head," Manx groaned. "Where's that Galento?"

"Who?"

"Grul."

"A tiger carried him off," Shak said. "Must have smelled the blood from when you cut Grul's cheek. It was smart of you, Ulg. You are the chief now."

Pete blinked, dazed. It seemed too good to be true. But Shak assured him that it had actually happened. A huge saber-tooth had bounded into the clearing, smelled the blood on Grul's jaw. Seizing the man, it had leaped back into the jungle. That, apparently, was that.

The whole tribe, Pete noticed, knelt in a circle. They were banging their heads on the ground. He gulped.

"You mean—I'm the boss? The big shot?"

Shak nodded and grinned. Pete took a deep breath?

“Then,” he said grimly, “there’s going to be a New Deal, starting right now. Yeah! A *Blitzkrieg*, pal—and watch my dust!”

Two days later, a transformed Pete Manx strolled about the camp. He had painfully fashioned shirt and shorts from the skin of a deer, and the other missing links were clothed similarly. It had been hard work, and the line of hairy men who stood solemnly in a row were far from sartorially perfect. But it was, at least, a start.

“Right—dress!” Pete roared.

Several dozen arms and heads flipped busily. Unfortunately the tribe didn’t know right from left.

“Patrol Leader Shak, report!” Pete ordered.

Shak stepped forward, saluting.

“All present, Ulg—I mean sir.”

Pete eyed the man’s uniform narrowly.

“Hold on. When I made you Patrol Leader, I sewed two stripes of white rat fur on your sleeve. What happened? Where are those two stripes?”

Shak wriggled miserably. Under Pete’s baleful glare he blinked embarrassedly.

“I—I ate ‘em,” he finally confessed.

Pete spoke at some length. When the air had cleared, he dismissed the troop. He stood watching them, feeling a strong sense of satisfaction. Shak was instructing three rookies in the art of making fire by friction. Farther away, two others were sending each other messages by means of semaphore flags. They certainly were doing it badly.

Others were practicing first-aid on an unwilling patient. He was finally subdued by the simple expedient of beating him over the head till he lay limp and was an actual patient.

Pete clucked happily to himself, and turned at a sound behind him. Grul was loping forward, a gaping scar on his left arm. The red giant’s teeth were bared in a vicious grin.

Pete’s stomach turned over sickeningly. He gurgled.

“Grul! But—but—”

“I killed the tiger,” stated Grul, licking his lips unpleasantly. “With my bare hands. And now—tonight—I shall kill and eat you, as I did the tiger.”

With that he sprang upon Pete and choked the horrified ex-barker into unconsciousness. Manx’s last thought was a vain regret that he had not remembered to invent the bow and arrow.

Some time later, Cave Man Manx recovered. Flickering firelight was gleaming in his eyes.

Rising unsteadily, Pete started. A huge figure bounded away toward the back of the cave in which he stood. It was Burl, the former chief, now motivated by the ego of a rabbit. Apparently Burl was destined for the same fate as Pete.

The cave had evidently been used as a storeroom. Piles of old hides, stacks of wood, clay pots, and various other primeval objects were scattered here and there. A fire was burning nearby. The cave wasn’t a large one, and Pete went toward the circle of blue sky that marked its mouth. He peered down and shuddered.

The ground was unpleasantly far below. The tribe was still squatting about their fire, and it was late afternoon. What had Grul said?

“Tonight we shall cook and eat him.”

“I’m getting out of here!” Pete remarked—but it was more easily said than done. The cliff outside the cave mouth was absolutely perpendicular. A line of pegs, stuck into holes cut in the rock-face, extended up from a ledge forty feet below. But the uppermost dozen pegs had been removed, making Pete a prisoner. Above him the cliff beetled out. Obviously there could be no escape that way.

Burl squeaked and hopped into a corner as Pete came back, scratching his head. What now? He couldn’t get out of this prison and there was nobody around for him to talk his way out. What was left? At dark Grul would come for him—and Pete would find himself the *entrée* at the feast. Frantically Manx’s eyes scanned the cave in the hope of discovering some weapon. But his search was futile.

Pete threw more wood on the fire, and then his eyes brightened. If Grul could only be frightened! If Pete could somehow manage to arouse the red giant’s superstitious fears, that would be far more effective than any weapon. Yet—how?

Pete examined the pile of skins in the cave. His attention was caught by the horned head of a bison, auroch, or buffalo. It was rather mangy, but the horns curled out terrifyingly. An interesting masquerade costume might be constructed from it, with the aid of a few strategically arranged skins. But that wouldn’t be enough.

The sound of lapping came to Pete’s ears. Turning, he saw Burl crouched toward the back of the cave. His face was buried in a little spring that rose silently to vanish in a hole in the wall. Abruptly Pete’s eyes widened.

“Eureka!” he whispered. “Maybe— Yeah! If it works, I think I got something!”

He had fire and water. For some reason that reminded Pete of his days barking before the Fun House at the amusement park. Suckers used to stand and gape when a horned devil arose through billowing white clouds, in an alcove above the ticket booth. An old stunt, and plenty corny, but—cavemen might fall for it.

Pete went to work. He didn’t know how much time he had, but the sun was ominously near the tree-tops. Swiftly he found all the pots he could and brought them to the spring. He filled them with water, after replenishing the fire.

Gluey yellow clay lined the banks of the little pool. Pete used it to seal the mouths of the water-filled pots. He went back to the pile of wood and selected a number of hollow bamboo poles.

The giant bamboo of prehistoric days towered as high as the great redwoods. Each segment, Pete saw, was about fifteen feet long—quite sufficient for his purposes. Selecting a dozen of the straightest of the hollow tubes, Pete brought them to the spring. He hastily went to work.

Each bamboo shoot was inserted in one of the water-filled pots. He packed clay about it, so the sealing was complete. After that, Pete baked the clay at the fire, taking pains not to burn the bamboo. He sent apprehensive glances toward the cave-mouth. It was nearly sundown.

As darkness fell, Pete grew more and more apprehensive. What if the clay pots failed to hold? Obviously they weren’t very strong. Well—there was only one way to tell.

Finding a sharp piece of flint, Pete whittled wooden stoppers for the bamboo tubes. He arranged the pots in the fire, and laid the poles fanwise toward the mouth of the cave. They just reached it, as Pete had planned.

Burl squeaked sadly and cowered against the wall. From below, loud shouts arose. The cavemen were becoming hungry.

The sun vanished behind the jungle fringe. Twilight deepened. Pete anxiously examined the pots. The clay was still holding. He fitted his stoppers into the bamboo tubes and then hurried to the pile of skins, selecting one of the largest. This he tied about his body. Struck by an idea, he added a dozen more, until he looked like a furry ovoid topped by a bullet-shaped head. The more grotesque he appeared, the more effective would be his stratagem. *If* it worked! Time dragged. From below, loud shouts still drifted up. Pete hovered frantically about his gadget, examining it with anxious eyes and fingers. So far it was working all right.

Burl squeaked. Pete waved at him with an assurance he didn't feel.

"It's okay, pal. Just relax. We've got 'em licked—I hope. . . ."

The moon rose. Simultaneously, suspicious noises were heard. Pete crept to the cave-mouth and peered over, holding the auroch head in one arm. The cavemen, led by Grul, were climbing up toward him. Their shadows slanted blackly along the steep cliff face.

Pete drew back sharply. The auroch head banged against a rock. One of the horns fell off. It rolled toward the brink. Manx caught it just in time.

He peered at it. Pretty old. It was hollow, in fact. It looked like—like a horn! Pete's eyes widened. He put the tip of the hollow horn to his lips, hesitated, and took a deep breath.

Then, abruptly, he felt a curious shock of disorientation. Briefly he felt himself falling, and the moonlight swam vaguely before his eyes. He saw, phantomlike, the walls of Dr. Mayhem's laboratory. . . .

Like a ghostly vision, it faded and was gone. Nor did it reappear. Pete felt weak with disappointment. For a moment he had hoped that he had been rescued, that Mayhem had got the time machine repaired. But it was not to be. Pete had to get out of this mess without anybody's help. He reached for the auroch head.

The tribe climbed up, Grul leading the way. They reached the ledge, passed it, and kept on. Grul drew some pegs from a pouch at his side and inserted them into the holes in the cliff face. He climbed more slowly now, and his long teeth were bared in a grin of anticipation.

CHAPTER IV

The End of the Ulg!

Grul's furred hands reached the lip of the ledge. The red giant drew himself up. He could see nothing but the fire inside the cave, and some lengths of bamboo that lay on the rock floor. He waited, crouching lower, while several fuzzy heads bobbed up behind him and blinking eyes stared.

"He is trying to hide," Grul stated. "Come. We shall kill and eat both Ulg and Burl."

The tribesmen started to clamber over the ledge. Then, without warning, hell broke loose!

A hairy devil bounded out of the shadows. It skipped to the bamboo tubes. With urgent haste, it bent to fumble at them. Grul's jaw dropped. Before he could gather his wits, a stinging, searing pain blinded him.

White clouds gushed out, spurting, aching, flame-hot! Steam, built up in the sealed clay pots in the fire, shot through the bamboo tubes as Pete pulled out the plugs. Clouds of hot steam rolled out, red-tinged by the flames farther back.

Nor was that all. The hairy devil—huger than a man, with a single horn projecting from its misshapen head—had raised another horn to its muzzle. The ear-shattering bellow of Pete Manx's improvised trumpet skirled out. Hideously discordant, it was obviously the hunger cry of a night-demon preparing to spring upon the horrified cavemen.

The men screamed in fright. The ones farther down the cliff could not see into the cave. Nevertheless, they noticed the clouds of steam rolling out and heard the horn, as well as the shrieks of their fellows. The tribe cascaded down the cliff like a waterfall, howling in terror.

Success went to Pete's head. Only Grul remained facing him, and the red giant was preparing to scramble down to safety. Pete made the error of trying to kick Grul in the teeth.

The caveman's reactions were instinctive. He blocked the blow, and his taloned fingers gripped Pete's leg. Manx tottered, yelped, and fell. The auroch head went rolling across the cave floor.

The clouds of steam were dying. Grul, blinking, stared at the astonishing sight before him. The demon's head was gone, and in its place was—Ulg's unprepossessing face.

Grul did not try to puzzle out the why or wherefore. He had a single-track mind. Consequently he bellowed in enraged fury and sprang at Pete.

"Hey!" Mr. Manx objected, as iron fingers sank into his throat. "Wait a— *Urk! Uggle!*" He said no more.

"I kill!" Grul roared.

Desperately Pete Manx tried to tear away the talons. Flat on his back, encumbered by the furs, he could make no real resistance. The face of Grul swam before his eyes. Pete gave himself up for lost.

Then, suddenly, Grul went away. He was merely picked up. He dangled in mid-air, kicking helplessly. Wheezing and gasping, Pete sat up, staring with bulging eyes. The red giant was held prisoned in the mighty grip of—Burl, the chief!

But Burl was insane, a caveman with the mind of a rabbit! Yet there was no madness in the chief's eyes. And there was, Pete thought, sound logic in Burl's remarks as he expressed his intention of tearing Grul into bits.

Abruptly Manx realized what had happened. Dr. Mayhem had repaired the time machine. The rabbit's ego had been returned to its normal time sector, 1940. Burl was himself again!

Pete applauded weakly. Grul was putting up a game battle, but the outcome of the struggle was already apparent. It became certain when Burl clouted Grul over the head. The incredible blow sent the red giant hurtling against the wall with a thud.

The vibrations of the thud didn't die. They grew stronger. Pete was conscious of a weird shock, a familiar sense of disorientation. The firelight faded before his eyes.

Just before he lost consciousness, he realized Mayhem was bringing him back to his original time sector.

Light came—blazing sunlight. Pete realized that he was standing on a crowded sidewalk. He moved aside because pedestrians shoved him out of their way. What had happened? He wasn't back in the laboratory.

He looked around. A signpost caught his eye—Central Park West and 65th Street. Central Park was just across the street. What had gone wrong?

Suddenly Pete guessed. He bought a paper. One glance at the date-line told him the truth.

Mayhem had not forgotten the original purpose of the experiment! Instead of bringing Pete back to the hour of the test in the laboratory, he had brought him back to the day before. Pete was in yesterday!

A column on the front page of the paper he held caught his eye.

“Kentucky Derby to be run today. Track clear—”

That meant that Pick-me-up had not yet won the race. But he would, perhaps in a few hours. Before that time Pete had to lay his wager. He fumbled in his pocket.

Less than a dollar in silver. In the wallet that he discovered in his coat, he found thirty dollars in bills. There was a driver's license that made him blink in amazement. It bore the name of—Professor Aker!

Naturally, when Pete went back through time, his mind had entered the body of somebody else. But Aker, of all people! Yet this was what had happened, as a glance in a nearby shop window proved. The reflection was that of the paunchy, dignified man with pince nez and a grim expression.

Pete thought fast. In the past, both he and Professor Aker had traveled into time. Perhaps because of that there existed some mysterious psychic affinity between them. That might explain a little. Yet the important thing now was Pick-me-up.

And that meant money. Laying thirty bucks on the nose of a sixty-to-one shot would make Manx die a thousand deaths all the rest of his life. Frantically Pete searched Aker's pockets. Nothing. The wallet, perhaps—

Aker was a careful man. He carried a blank, signed check in one compartment of the wallet. It was too good to be true. Pete found a fountain pen and filled in a four figure sum. He didn't know Aker's bank balance, and it wouldn't do to take a chance. Then he took a taxi to the bank.

Before he entered, he took the precaution of bandaging his right hand with a handkerchief. But all went well. The teller nodded affably as Pete presented the check. He watched as the pseudo-Aker painfully scribbled a signature on the back.

“Lucky I saw you sign that,” the teller smiled. “Otherwise I wouldn't have let it pass. How'd you hurt your hand, Professor?”

“It ain't—isn't serious,” Pete responded. “But I am in a hurry.”

With his wallet bulging, he hurried away to a place he knew and proceeded to lay his bet on Pick-me-up. He wasn't feeling well. There was a strangely heavy dullness oppressing his mind, and he felt slightly drunk. It was the precursor of another journey into time, he knew. So he hastened to finish his task before he could be jerked back to the lab.

Through a haze he heard the bookie's voice. He fumbled with the wallet, but couldn't manage it. He thrust the object out.

"All of it, bud. On the nose. Pick-me-up. Sixty to one, eh?"

He didn't hear the bookie's answer. Nor did he know what came after that.

But he found himself suddenly waking up in Dr. Mayhem's laboratory.

The rabbit was contentedly eating lettuce in a corner, apparently unmoved by his journey into the past. Pete rose from the experimental chair and gulped the brandy Mayhem handed him. "Thanks," he nodded. "I needed that. *Whew!*"

Professor Aker was teetering back and forth, eyeing Pete.

"Well? Did it succeed?"

"Did it! Wow!" Mr. Manx paused as a thought hit him. "Say, Prof, didn't you say you had a touch of amnesia yesterday?"

"Why, yes. In the morning. Why?"

"Nothing," Pete grinned. "Thanks for the help, Doc. I gotta scram. There's a bookie—"

"Hold on!" Mayhem's lean figure bobbed excitedly. "I want to hear what happened. A paradox like this requires elucidation. Did you really go back to yesterday?"

Before Pete could answer there was a knock on the door. A dapper, thin-faced man entered, wearing a gaudy checkered suit. His birdlike eyes probed about questingly.

"They told me I'd find Professor Aker down here," he observed. "Oh, there you are."

"What?" Aker stared. "Who are you?"

Pete pushed forward. "Hiya, Mike. You're making a mistake. Remember, I laid a thousand bucks on Pick-me-up yesterday?"

The bookie's eyes narrowed.

"What're you trying to pull, Manx? Think I'm still wet behind the ears? You ought to know better than to try anything like that with me."

"Hey!" Pete turned green. "That thousand bucks—"

"Sure. This guy Aker comes rushing in yesterday, looking ready to keel over, and pushes a grand at me to lay on Pick-me-up. Prob'ly drunk. When I ask him his name, he just looks at me. So I copy it down out of his wallet—Aker. Here y'are, mister. Sixty thousand, and the check's good."

Professor Aker accepted the check, staring at it in stupefaction. He exchanged amazed glances with Mayhem as the bookie departed.

"You can't do that to me!" Pete yelled. "I laid that grand on—"

"I'm beginning to see," Dr. Mayhem nodded, and Aker's eyes suddenly widened.

"So do I. Mayhem, do you know what this means? We can leave the college and build our own experimental laboratories!"

Dr. Mayhem beamed. "Yes, Aker. Think of what we can do on synapses with that money behind us. What equipment we can have!"

"That dough ain't yours," Pete almost screamed. "It's illegal. You're going to spend that *dinero* on rabbits and guinea-pigs?"

Mayhem lifted his eyebrows at Aker. “After all, we do owe this good fortune to Pete. Don’t you think so?”

“Of course,” the Professor smiled. “Ten per cent. That’s fair enough, the usual commission.”

“Six thousand bucks?” Pete looked ready to cry. “And I coulda cleaned up sixty thousand. I’m being double-crossed.” He moaned in anguish. “I do all the work, and what do I get?”

“Six grand,” Mayhem said.

“Yeah. . . .” Pete glanced at the time machine. His face suddenly brightened. “Okay. It’s a deal. The gee-gees are running at Saratoga next month. Don’t forget— It’s a date!”

[The end of *Man About Time* by Henry Kuttner (as Kelvin Kent)]