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Opening extract from
**The Incredible Adventures of
Professor Branestawm**

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I. The Professor Invents a Machine

PROFESSOR Branestawm, like all great men, had simple tastes. He wore simple trousers with two simple legs. His coat was simply fastened with safety pins because the buttons had simply fallen off. His head was simply bald and it simply shone like anything whenever the light caught it.

It was a wonderful head was the Professor's. He had a high forehead to make room for all the pairs of glasses he wore. A pair for



*He simply hadn't time to think
of ordinary things*

reading by. A pair for writing by. A pair for out of doors. A pair for looking at you over the top of and another pair to look for the others when he mislaid them, which was often. For although the Professor was so clever, or perhaps *because* he was so clever, he was very absentminded. He was so busy thinking of wonderful things like new

diseases or new moons that he simply hadn't time to think of ordinary things like old spectacles.

He had very few friends because people found it so very difficult to talk to him. It was like being at a lecture or in a schoolroom. Every second word he said you couldn't understand and he asked you questions worse than any you'd ever find on an exam paper.

But there was one man who was very fond of the Professor. And that was Colonel Dedshott, of the Catapult Cavaliers, a very brave gentleman who never missed a train, an enemy, or an opportunity of getting into danger.

'Well, well,' the Colonel was saying to himself in his usual brisk military manner, as he strode along the road towards the house where the Professor lived, 'it's quite a time since I saw Branestawm' – you can tell how friendly he was with the Professor to talk about him like that, not saying Mr Branestawm or

Professor Branestawm or Branestawm Esquire or anything. 'I am glad he invited me.'

Yes, the Professor had invited him.

'Dear Dedshott,' ran the Professor's note, 'Come and see me tomorrow if you can. I have an invention that will change all our ideas of travel.'

You see the Professor could write quite simple, easy-to-understand letters when he liked. So the Colonel was going to have his ideas of travel changed.

He arrived at the Professor's house, when he got there, to the second. That was his military punctuality.

'The Professor's in his workshop, Sir,' said Mrs Flittersnoop, the Housekeeper, who opened the door. 'He'll be out directly.'

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than a deafening explosion rent the air and the Professor came out of his workshop. He came out rather more like a cannon ball than a man welcoming a friend to his house, but he came

out, which was the main thing. And most of the workshop came out with him.

When the smoke had cleared away the Professor put his hand to his head, pulled down the pair of glasses that he kept for looking at you over the top of, and looked at the Colonel over the top of them.

‘Tut, tut,’ he said, ‘that was most unfortunate. I had a little too much of the whateveritis of the thingummy. I put plenty in to make sure there was enough. I’m afraid I’ve made rather a mess.’

‘Not at all,’ said the Colonel. It wasn’t his workshop, so why should he mind? ‘What do we do next?’

The Professor examined a piece of machinery that had landed on the geranium bed and pushed it into the back garden before replying.

‘Happily nothing is damaged,’ he said, ‘so we can go on from where I left off. This is my new invention.’ He patted the machine, which

looked something like a cross between a typewriter, an egg timer, and a conjuring trick.

‘Yes,’ said the Colonel intelligently, wondering what it was all about.

‘Listen,’ went on the Professor, ‘and I will explain.’

The Colonel sat down on the garden roller and started listening.

‘If you travel by coach from this town to the next it takes two hours,’ said the Professor. ‘But if you go twice as fast it takes only one hour.’

‘Of course,’ said the Colonel.

‘And if you go twice as fast as that it takes only half an hour.’

‘Quite,’ said the Colonel.

‘And if you go fast enough it takes no time at all, so that you get there the moment you start. Very well’ – the Professor was warming up to his subject and he leaned forward excitedly. ‘If you go still faster you will get there in less than no time so that you arrive there before you left here. Do you understand?’

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‘Perfectly,’ said the Colonel, not understanding anything.

‘Well then,’ went on the Professor, wagging a long thin finger, ‘that means that the farther you go, the sooner you will get there, and if you go far enough you will arrive several years ago.’

‘Come on,’ said the Colonel, getting up with his head going round and round at the very thought of it, ‘let’s start. I’d like to go back to a party I was at three years ago.’

The Professor, eager to demonstrate his machine, took out a tooth pick, a marmalade spoon and a pair of scissors, and soon had the machine wound up and adjusted ready to start.

‘Wait a minute,’ he cried and ran into the house, coming out a moment later with a small box.

‘Bombs,’ he explained simply, ‘my own invention. Each one will kill an army. We’ll take them in case of danger. Are you armed?’

The Colonel nodded and tapped his belt where he always carried his trusty catapult and a bag of bullets.

‘Aye,’ he said, and they got into the machine together, the Professor falling off on the other side and having to get on again, just as the Housekeeper came out with a cup of tea for each of them.

‘Right away,’ called the Professor, who knew all about railways, taking no notice of her.

The Colonel said nothing. He wasn’t able to, because as the machine shot off the ground such a gust of wind caught him in the mouth that he could hardly breathe, let alone call out things.

Blue and yellow smoke shot out from every part of the machine. Wheels whizzed. Levers clicked. Little bits of stuff went buzzing up and down and round and round. And far beneath them the landscape rushed by quicker and quicker until at last they could see nothing but a grey haze all round them.

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On went the machine, but nothing else happened. On and on they whirled, and nothing happened. And it kept on happening over and over again, till everything was so nothing that neither of them could notice anything.

Presently the Professor thought it was time to stop, so he rang his bell and put the brake on.

Gradually everything began to be something. The grey haze went and the landscape came back and soon they were descending into the middle of a large field.

‘Are we there?’ asked the Colonel, getting his breath back and using some of it at once.

‘We must have passed it,’ said the Professor, peering down. ‘What’s going on down there?’

‘Why, it’s a battle,’ cried the Colonel, loosening his catapult in his belt. ‘But it isn’t a battle I remember fighting in. Anyway I can’t see me there and I should be there if I was, shouldn’t I?’

The Professor nodded his head, and then shook it to show that he understood.

‘You weren’t there,’ he said, ‘we’re in Squiglatania, a foreign country. I know this battle. It happened two years ago. There was a revolution, but the King’s troops beat the revolutionists. Those are the King’s troops, the red ones.’

‘Let’s join in,’ cried the Colonel, and at once he began firing off bullets from his catapult, while the Professor opened his box and rained his deadly bombs on the scene below, as the machine dropped slowly downwards.

‘Gock, boom, smack pop boom. Twack boom clack plop boom,’ went the bombs and the catapult bullets, and by the time the machine touched the ground there was hardly a soldier or a revolutionist left.

‘Hurray,’ yelled the Colonel, jumping out and rushing about, followed by the Professor.

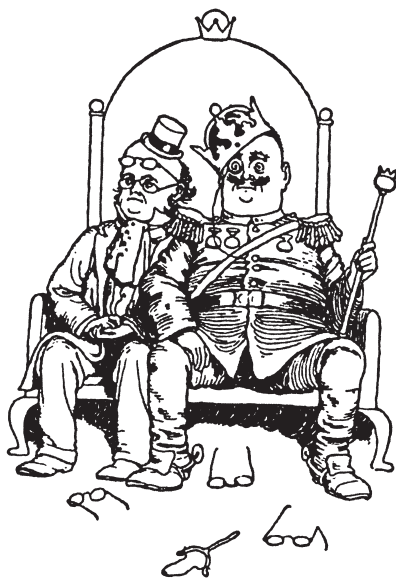
‘Hurray,’ yelled a little band of revolutionists, who had been hiding behind some rocks. ‘We’ve won, thanks to you.’

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And before the Professor and the Colonel knew where they were, the revolutionists carried them off to the Palace and sat them on the King's throne, which happily was wide enough for both of them, as the King had been a very fat man.

'Hail, our Presidents!' they shouted.

And bands played, fireworks went off, people danced and ate more than was good for them, to celebrate the victory.



And sat them on the King's throne

‘This is all wrong, you know,’ said the Professor, ‘it was the King’s troops who won really. We’ve done something nasty to history, I’m afraid. I had no idea we should alter the battle like that.’

‘Never mind,’ said the Colonel, who rather fancied himself as a President. ‘Let’s do some ruling.’

But whether it was that the Professor, although he knew so much about everything, didn’t know enough about ruling; or whether it was that the Colonel, not being used to such high command, gave himself airs rather too much; or whether it was that the Revolutionist people, who didn’t like being governed by one King, found it wasn’t any more fun being governed by two Presidents, things didn’t go at all well.

First there was trouble about who should wear the crown. It was too small for the Professor’s brainy head, and too big for the Colonel’s bullet head.

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Then the Colonel wanted to review the troops and there weren't any troops. They'd all been blown to bits with the Professor's bombs or catapulted with the Colonel's catapult, so he had to play with toy soldiers from the Palace Nursery. And of course no real live Colonel cares much about that sort of thing.



Had to play with toy soldiers