

The Patriotic Time Loop

by Nathaniel Bates

The following is a work of historical science fiction. Some actual historical figures are represented while others are invented persons. Some theories of physics are accurate while others are casually speculative. Any similarity to actual historical figures is merely coincidental. Of course, that is what I would want you to think.

Marx once declared he was not a Marxist. Jesus might have said he was not a Christian. If one studies the mystical thought of Newton one realizes that he was not a “Newtonian” in the sense that he did not believe in a mechanistic Universe. Darwin was probably not a “Darwinian.” Was the pacifist leaning Oppenheimer a nuclear scientist? I pondered the unanswerable when I stared at the statue of Oppenheimer and Leslie Groves, staring to a point of intersection over the center divider of a small road. I had the best bagel sandwich in a long time of pouring over equations and the delicious cheese inspired what passed for philosophical thoughts since leaving University. I was hired on as a theoretical physicist but in Los Alamos one’s position is always fluid once Clearance is granted.

I was a radical in University and joined several anarchist and socialist organizations. I figured I would remain a theoretical physicist and never get moved around because I would never be granted Clearance in a million years in the stronghold of America’s National Security establishment. But, moved around I was, once Clearance was granted. I quickly absorbed concepts in Applied Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, and even Biological Science. The only thing I did not figure out was what to do with Doubt. Even going to work for Los Alamos

National Lab, or LANL as we knew it, was nothing short of a crisis of conscience. Oppenheimer and other early Manhattan Project scientists underwent a similar crisis of conscience that was quickly resolved for them once the McCarthy era repression set in and they lost the all-important Clearance. Oppenheimer himself was spit out due to claims he was a Communist or at least soft on leftism. I lived with the daily fear that my own insignificant life might mirror his should my membership in the “No State and No Capitalism” society become the subject of any real investigation.

Los Alamos was a community in which people internalized secrecy. It was part of our DNA as much as nucleic acid. Most of the community was conservative; a fact of life after the McCarthy era ended the free-wheeling Manhattan Project era, and knew I was somehow different. Yet, a tolerance set in once people knew me. Toleration and secrecy go together in remote places where man must come to terms with his fellow man if he is going to survive. Nuclear scientists are fathers and mothers. Nuclear scientists want a peaceful world also, and honestly believe that they must do what they are doing if democratic society is going to survive. Nuclear scientists are men and not monsters, a fact of human reality lost on my more youthful self, which could not accept the fact that I had to sacrifice my youthful idealism on the altars of the idolatrous god of Work and goddess of Survival, a sacrifice that I considered they required. I eventually convinced myself that the only way more radical alternatives would survive in the world is if liberal democracy survived against its challenges among repressive regimes and terrorist threats, a line of thought that put me in the mainstream of Los Alamos even if I never admitted it to myself. I quickly began to embrace a career path that was the opposite of what I had once embraced. The reality that Berkeley was long behind me set in as I stared at the fire-

burned hills and longed for the weekends when I could embrace the green still left on the other side of them.

Thoughts of my trip to Jemez Springs drifted away as I realized that lunch was ending and that Work awaited my return. The taste of the bagel sandwich was still in my mouth when I entered the Project Leader's Office. "Doctor Specter," he began in a firm tone of voice that sent fear throughout my body. I opened my mouth to apologize for being delayed and that I would stay later, but he cut me off, "It is time for the next step in your career. It is time for an enhanced clearance beyond what is ordinarily known. It is been granted now and we will begin." I was stunned when he took me by the arm and moved me to an elevator behind his desk. We were inside of the elevator when I had enough meta-cognition to realize that the taste of the bagel was gone from my memory.

I had always heard strange rumors of something underneath Los Alamos. The fact that I was there happened too quickly for me to respond to it with anything less than numb shock. It was a good thing I had a good lunch. I was brought to a room and the Project Leader intoned cryptically, "Forget all of the nuclear business. Nuclear is part of what we do here, but there are many more secrets than just that. Nuclear is important; it is to keep the Russians on their toes and the Iranians scared. But there is more. Down here you will see wormholes, zero point energy, the bending of space-time and other deep secrets that never get out. As a theoretical physicist, this is your new home. You are one of the lucky few." Stable wormholes? Such a thing is not very likely given...known principles of physics. I trembled but began, "Sir. The amount of energy required to make a wormhole stable would be astronomical not to mention the fact that we do not have a stable theory of exotic matter. All of these are possible given known laws of physics, but well beyond our capabilities." The Boss simply smiled, a smile that inferred

to me that there was much about our capabilities that would never see the light of day. I was taken to the wormhole room. At least it was a room with a wormhole in it even if I never knew what to call it. The gravity (or lack thereof) of this situation finally dawned on me.

The Boss left and I realized I had a new Boss. “Doctor Specter,” a handsome man in a non-characteristic formal dark suit never worn by any scientist I had ever met in LANL before, “Please call me Jonathan. My last name is unimportant.” I was given a total indoctrination. The wormhole was part of a series of wormholes that honeycombed through time. In order to achieve such effect, it would be necessary to place the ends of wormholes in other time frames. Current Physics made placing one end of a wormhole back in time possible but unlikely. However, the future was a whole other time with possibilities beyond our imagination. A wormhole end from the future could be rotated around a large gravitational body and possibly sent back in time, that is, if Godelian time travel theories stood up to scrutiny. It was a wormhole network and not one wormhole merely, all intelligently designed. Apparently these wormholes were placed at strategic times in human history, including our own time, which seemed to suggest that whoever placed them knew what they were doing. They even knew where the underground secret lab was at Los Alamos and how to surprise a bunch of physicists who as brilliant as they were would have no ability to create what they saw appear before them. This was no cover story. Without a doubt, the wormhole came from the future. Eventually someone from the future came through the wormhole and identified himself as a human who was part of a galactic civilization that would be well in the future. All of this was told to me just an hour after I was in the afternoon sun staring at the simple beauty of Fuller Lodge and the statues of long dead town heroes on this side of the fire-burned hills.

I blinked and the story continued. This visitor was now mobbed with questions. Security was not allowed in the Bunker. No guns were pointed at him but each question was a bullet of curiosity. I asked him, “Why is it that the creation of this network of wormholes in your own past did not alter the timeline or create new causalities in parallel Universes?” He answered, “The wormholes connected what to me was the past with my present in a way that would never break causality. By observing a given quantum state in the past it was as if I were observing it in the present, creating a time loop that could never be altered. What could be altered is my own future, our distant future, which would exist after the wormhole network’s most distant future. In other words, by observing the past I could then alter its meaning for the remote distant future after my time, even if my own past remained constant.” It did not take this Los Alamos physicists long to realize that our own observations of what would be our own past would have a similar effect on what the past would mean for our own far distant future. It also did not take long for me to realize the national security implications of such a fact.

We could send someone back in to the past in order to alter its meaning for the future. Of course, whatever future we created would be the future that visited us on that fateful day, but since not a lot was known about it we had the freedom to maneuver. No parallel Universe would be created we conjectured because we were in a closed time loop. Einstein would be proud since quantum uncertainty would not affect causality, at least in the near future. The uncertainty principle would create no problems for our own return from the past should we decide to embark on such a journey. There were uncertainties nonetheless. Our visitor came from a time before the humans and aliens joined into one civilization, but with the aliens at a slight advantage commercially and politically. The aliens from the visitor’s immediate past had manipulated the wormhole network and were using it to alter the meaning of their future, which was well after the

formation of the visitor's own civilization. They were changing his future to give themselves an even greater advantage. Nothing the visitor did in our time would change his future, but since his future had not been observed yet there was a paradoxical room for him and us to maneuver. It was a peaceful competition between our descendents and Them, but one that had to be taken seriously.

Our wormhole connected us to the period just before the American Revolution. The wormhole would only stay stable for so long, and we had limited windows in which to intervene. The less morally advanced aliens of his past were going to head back in time and try to influence the direction of the American Revolution. That is all he would tell us. We were on a Need to Know basis, something we at LANL understood very well. What I did know is that I was the lucky one chosen to be sent back in time to Ben Franklin's study during the period just prior to the American Revolution, based on the presumption that a theoretical physicist from the present would somehow speak sense to an eminent scientist in the days that bifocals were the latest App, and electricity shock parties the flash gatherings of the time. You have got to hand it to government logic. It may not be the most efficient but it knows how to get the best talent. At least I was chosen with the Democrats in the White House. Under Republicans I would never have passed the background check.

Of course I jumped at the chance. Meeting Benjamin Franklin was the dream of a scientist, the dream of a thinker, and the cartoon special of every American childhood. Sadly, my having been chosen did not endear me to the others in my new division. In order to understand why, I have to explain something about the sociology of Los Alamos Laboratories. One never refers to anyone as "doctor." It is a social *faux pas* that extends back to the Manhattan Project in which such a reference was a security risk. In modern times, the reasons go much

deeper. My PhD allowed me to go to the past and see history through a stable wormhole. It is one thing for a PhD to have a special line in the cafeteria (one did not) but this was taking educational and status divisions to a whole new level. Most in the underground division had to deceive their friends and neighbors as to exactly where in the lab they worked. This was no easy task since they lived in a small town among people who were deeply suspicious of anyone who seemed out of place and my colleagues felt they should be compensated for that loss somehow. At least they felt they should have been compensated for the sense of the loss of wholeness in their lives by making the surprise visit to Benjamin Franklin a team effort representing all of them.

Even the Federal government did not do time travel by committee, so I was the one with the sole burden of handling travel through a stable wormhole. Fortunately, the traveler from the future left us with a few helpful tools. A special suit allowed us to handle the changes in gravitation that I would experience. (The alien competitors apparently *did* have the quantum theory of gravity that eludes us in our time.) I would appear in this suit and appear inside of Ben Franklin's office in a wormhole that would only be stable for so long and hope for the best. Something told me that tarring and feathering could be the least of my problems if the eighteenth century Patriots perceived me as someone threatening. However, I knew that the adventure of a lifetime awaited and that I was first and foremost a scientist. I had to know how the Universe worked and I *would* know. It was not but two hours before I was off through a tunnel in space-time leading me to the Post Master General's Office in 1775. I stood before a spectacled scientist who saw a mysterious tunnel appear in his room expecting fear or rage. What I saw instead was curiosity, as if he were expecting me, or at least expecting the Universe to be

mysterious. "Hello," he began excitedly, as if no time has passed between his surprise and his curiosity, "are you a denizen of the spheres? Mars? I must know!"

This was not the mobbing I expected, but I would accept it. It turned out that Franklin had his own dealings with the aliens from the future, and was not surprised. "I am a man. I come from the future," I responded at which point Ben Franklin looked a bit cross. He was hoping for more interactions with his friends from off planet. He looked mystified, but soon smiled. An interaction with a human from the future might be just as interesting. We discussed the latest developments in science. By latest developments I meant Relativity, Quantum Physics and Biology. Franklin was very surprised by the idea that space and time itself could bend. He was even more surprised by some of the strange behaviors of subatomic particles described by Quantum Physics. He was scandalized by the theory of evolution, but he appeared to be satisfied by the idea that speciation was really caused by a selection process and not some mysterious *élan vital*. Erasmus Darwin was a good friend but a bit overly romantic, whereas his grandson Charles was level headed. Franklin was not a fan of mysterious transformations but something as banal as selection he could accept. The idea that a chimp was a close relative of humans gave him no end of pleasure. Some humans bore the family resemblance very well, he quipped, with a vague reference to His Majesty George III.

The conversation turned to politics. Franklin wanted to know how the conflict with the Crown would end. I told him that there was only one way freedom would be accomplished was through independence. Franklin was somber, feeling the loss of the mother country as profoundly as one feels the loss of a friend. Britain was the homeland of liberty, the free air of England being the birthplace of the freedom that the Patriots were battling to preserve. The idea that only an independent nation with a written Constitution that did not rely on judicial precedent

alone would allow individual rights to survive the transition to industrialism and the space age was a revolutionary concept. It would not be absorbed in one sitting. The Patriots were still fighting for what they considered their rights as Englishmen and might take separation as treason. Many were adamant Puritans who would see the scientist from the future as an incarnation of Old Nick himself. Separation from the King still meant separation from God for many colonists and such a concept as independence proclaimed by a Godless scientist from the future might drive Patriots into the arms of the Crown.

Still, Franklin knew it had to be done. The colonists had to be persuaded to go their own path or the scientific civilization promised in the future would be in serious jeopardy. Otherwise old feudal traditions would stand, retarding science and holding back human progress. Deep in his heart, Franklin knew himself that he would never truly be a full Englishman after he was driven out of his high position in London by a court of mockers. Yes, he realized that he deserved to lose his position for having read the mail of fellow gentlemen, no matter how noble the cause. It was the *mockery* exhibited by his enemies that was unfitting treatment of an Englishman. The mockery established him as a foreigner.

Independence from England was only something an Englishman could accomplish because otherwise it was a radical innovation that would not be trusted. It had to be the mechanic philosopher Paine. Only Thomas Paine had the penmanship to accomplish the revolution in attitudes that would lead to the *United States of America* described so eloquently by the future scientist in his most ungentlemanly suit. I would need a new suit if I were going to fit in to the America of powdered wigs and quill pens.

Franklin arranged a meeting between the Man from the Future and Thomas Paine. Paine was more suspicious than Franklin, a suspicion born of life in cosmopolitan England in which

Franklin's genteel trust of strangers would be naïve. I explained my case to Tom, as I eventually came to call him, and he became more and more animated. I made my second convert, one even more energetic than Franklin himself. We would have our tract titled "Common Sense," meant to appeal to the ordinary sense of the colonists. I told Paine to wait until 1776 for publication when the time would be ready. All would go according to plan. I held the wisdom of the future in my hands and it was within the power of human kind to begin the world again as in the days of Noah, or so Paine himself wrote so eloquently.

I entered Franklin's office and told him I would see him soon. I suited up so that I could withstand the gravitational forces of the wormhole and left for the deep and dark underground of Los Alamos. The Project Leader stood right in front of me and smiled. I had passed my first assignment with flying colors. America would become a great nation that would value her independence. As I took off my suit for a period of rest and recuperation, I could not lose the vaguely sinister nature of the Project Leader's smile. This mission was more than it appeared on the surface. It was less about the future than it was about the present. Influencing the past meant influencing the future. I had, in effect, started a war that would serve as a precedent for future wars in which America cast herself as the champion of freedom. Such a position was a double edged sword. All wars are cast as being wars for freedom, or wars for profit depending on the side one takes. We fought for freedom against the British but often sided against freedom when it came to supporting right-wing dictators during the Cold War. Never forget that Republics become Empires. I had a vague unease when I briefly wondered whether the mission was about freedom for itself or "freedom" as a pretext. I soon suppressed my doubt when I remembered that without this intervention the whole concept of social change would remain suppressed in the mists of feudal darkness.

There was one more intervention that I had to undertake to make sure that the American Revolution began on track. As I passed through the wormhole, I walked toward the Second Continental Congress. It was 1776 and the Convention was divided. Some colonists felt that separation was treason, and that we should aim for a relationship to England similar to that of equal nations in a common union which was later established by the British Commonwealth. Separation was too radical for their tastes. Some in the South feared that an independent nation would become “democratical” and thus a threat to slavery. A few Puritans in the North feared the radical Deists among the Conventioneers as much as they feared the “tyrant King of England.” The former were in league with atheist philosophers while the latter was in league with Jesuit enemies of Protestantism. A choice between those two camps was hard since they had to decide whom they hated more. Finally, there was a fear of slavery and its spread among some in the North otherwise inclined toward separation, and a strong sense of hypocrisy when they saw Virginians crying for liberty. They hoped that the new nation would be a confederacy and not a union, since a union would mean a great deal of power for slave owners.

It was into this division that I entered. Franklin immediately recognized me as I was dressed in black. He acknowledged me as “the Professor” and implied that I carried the hidden wisdom of the philosophers of Europe. There were enough Freemasons and earnest seekers of mystery that I was allowed in under the invitation of Franklin. Some even knew I was from the future. It was all kept secret in the Lodge, of course. I stood up and gave the best rousing speech I could give. I was a member of radical student organizations in college, and felt in the depths of my heart that humanity can change the world if unified. The ideals of the “No State and No Capitalism” were still buried deep in my being. It almost scared me the sincerity of it all. “God

has given America to be free!” were words that came deep from within me. There was wild enthusiasm as the measure for independence passed.

I left the Convention Hall before anyone could detain me and ask who I was. My speech would go down in Masonic legend as that of a “mysterious stranger” who appeared before the Convention and urged them to freedom. I felt my place in history keenly. I knew that I had influenced America for the better. If I had not intervened, would independence still have been certain? The answer is that I had to intervene because I had already intervened hundreds of years in my past. No alterations were possible. What I did not know was whether my attitude, my thoughts, my deepest passions were themselves determined. If so, then I had no free will. The difference was between a merely mechanical intervention on the part of the military-industrial complex I had given my working life to but never my full obedience versus a passion for freedom. My job and my deepest inclinations both led me to the same historical act but for different reasons. In the moment of passion before the Convention I meant every word I said and knew that a glorious future was possible if man only set aside poverty, racism and...war itself. I made it back to the wormhole, but I knew that more interventions were to come, even as they already came in my own past.

I was back in the Bunker in what I felt was modern times, debriefing and relaxing. Still, disturbing thoughts came to my mind more and more. My dedication was in making sure that the American democratic impulse continued well in to the future, that it would matter. I wanted to make sure that the future was not some impersonal future in which popular participation meant nothing. Even inveterate radical Noam Chomsky, a critic of American foreign policy, believed in the inherently radical promise of what Paine offered the world. Even so, my sense was that the Lab hierarchy had another agenda. They wanted national independence for the sake

of the military power that would arise and not so much for democracy as its own ideal. Specifically, they wanted American military might to mold the coming future. The two goals may intertwine in some ways, but they were inherently different in that military may need “democracy” as a slogan but there was very little in the way of actual popular participation desired. Most citizens of Northern New Mexico, be they Indian, Hispanic, or the liberal Anglo’s of Santa Fe or Taos, had very little in the way of input in to a Lab that affected their futures. Most scientists in Los Alamos did not have that much more of an influence. Much was made of “radiation leaks,” much hyped about real or imagined health dangers from radiation. What was almost never discussed was the fact that a Lab that could have been dedicated to peaceful exploration of space or nuclear electricity generation remained tied to militarism.

The very, very distant future must have a plan or none of this would be happening. It might be that they had no other choice but to build the wormholes because the wormholes already appeared in their own past. But, they at least had a choice as to what the wormholes meant to them. They had a choice in their own future, which did not happen yet. I had to have faith that their own future meant something to them that it might not have meant to the aliens in the intermediate future or to the humans in the present. I would continue the mission with full faith in its benevolent outcome. It was a faith-based position unbecoming of a scientist. But, it was my position and I had no choice but to stick with it. My country was depending on me---in 1780. Better late than never.

The wormhole was ready to appear in General Washington’s encampment in his personal quarters. I would speak to him personally as he undoubtedly knew of me. Franklin had indeed told him about the Professor from the future who spoke words of “philosophic wisdom,” an eighteenth century term for science that could also be confused for metaphysics. As I appeared

in his office while he was alone, the General did not reach for any weapon. He looked at me with a stoic determination to face the world as it was, with its terrors as well as its wonders. As we conversed tersely, with some distrust on his part, I told him that I would need to be a part of the Culper Spy Ring in some capacity. Washington smiled, and realized that only a true Patriot from the future would even remember such a detail of history that in his time was known only to a select few. I smiled too and realized that he was one of the few American Generals who did not fear that I was a potential subversive.

No one ever knew who Agent 355 of the Culper Ring was. Many theories had been proposed but none proven beyond a reasonable doubt. It turns out that no theory was correct. I was introduced to a woman who was young, unmarried and unknown. She was a member of a Tory household but she herself was a secret Patriot. Her name was Sarah Nettie and she would spy for the Patriots on friends of her own household. She was committed to liberty; a liberty that she assumed would be extended to all humans after the Revolution, Black as well as White, Red as well as Colonist, Female as well as Male. It saddened me to know that her vision would take some time but I did not have the heart to tell her. I would pretend to be Sarah's husband while she travelled some distance to report on who might have been an influence on Benedict Arnold. We also wanted to know what networks he might have created that would function either as spies during the Revolution, or perhaps an Anglophile network within the new Republic if independence were ever won.

History never recorded Sarah's existence but I knew her sad end. She would inevitably die on a prison ship after which point no one would hear from her again. Her heroism would be little known and her identity completely unknown. I struggled with the thought of warning her, of telling her to get as far away from this mission as possible, but I knew I could not. It was

already the past. Instead, we went to Boston Massachusetts, the heart of Puritan Patriot Yankeedom, to uncover a possible Tory spy ring in the very heart of the resistance movement. George III knew he had lost Massachusetts, and would be glad to see it independent. He still hoped to hold on to the Deep South and the middle colonies in which Tory sympathizers could still be found. He would rather that New England become a Puritan Republic that would cease to be a bother to him. The New England Confederacy might even become an ally against France or Spain in the long run if he played his cards right. In order for this to happen, he needed to cultivate some degree of Tory sympathies among the population as a wedge to use for the time when he thought he could make a deal with Massachusetts and other Northern colonies to leave the Empire without taking other colonies with them. Even parts of Pennsylvania could possibly be salvaged while letting the Scots-Irish and the dissenters leave with New England.

Washington, Henry, Mason and Jefferson would have to flee North from Virginia after the War in order to be free or else take degrading Oaths of loyalty to their King once again.

I knew that such a plan would damage the future Republic irreparably if it had succeeded. It would have another effect that would be devastating for human freedom. It would cement the future of slavery in a British Empire which would become the ally of slave owners who would remain loyal to the Crown while New England separated. British abolitionism was key to ending slavery. Keeping the South as a loyal dominion would alter all of that since the Crown would remain a bulwark for slavery against its opponents. George III's secret plan would have ended it. I did not have time to reflect on such an abhorrent thought when Sarah and I arrived in Boston pretending to be husband and wife. We checked in to an inn without causing any suspicion. I glanced at this beautiful lady with locks in her hair. I would be sleeping on the floor, I knew. A

full night's sleep on hard wood and I would be meeting with a soldier in the Washington's Army that we suspected was being groomed by Tories as an agent of influence in Boston.

Charles Worthington was Sarah's cousin, although he kept this fact low key because being related to Tories aroused suspicion. I claimed to represent a leading European bank offering the Patriot cause a loan. However, underneath that identity I would pretend to be a Tory sympathizer recruiting for the cause. We would trap him and expose the treason that was afoot. I had asked Sarah if she minded that he was her cousin and she did not even blink. I was a bit fearful of her vehemence, a Patriotism that put country first and family second. Our modern times knew of no such vehemence. Our individualism was a broadly accepted feeling across the political spectrum. The modern left was not as nationalist as it once was and our modern right accepted the constructs of Randian libertarianism. Few on either side were old fashioned Patriots and while refreshing in a way it also put me ill at ease.

I stepped forward to shake the hands of the man I would be entrapping. "I was unaware that my cousin had married, Mr. Boucher," he began. I disguised myself as George Trumbull Boucher, a name chosen because of its uncanny resemblance to Jonathan Boucher, the Tory clergyman. I was banking on the implied connection putting him at ease. I began with the pleasantries of business, and then hinted that we could retire to the smoke room and discuss Real Business. Sarah remained behind. Her curtsy was very lady like, feminine. I knew that she was a proto-feminist hero and the like but she played the part of submissive wife too well. I had to admit that it was exciting for me to be in the presence of someone so beautiful, particularly since I had not dated in two years added to over two hundred years of time travel.

"Mr. Worthington, I need to be honest." I saw him come at ease with a smile on his face and continued, "I have told you I am here at the behest of a Dutch bank. In fact, I am here at the

behest of your King whose friendship the rebels have so dishonorably and unmanfully abandoned. The honor of country has been abandoned for the love of money and the frenzy of the mob. A true gentleman like yourself, a descendant of the aristocracy of Norman warriors, knows the value of honor and loyalty. I am offering you a chance to serve your King against rebels to his name.” Charles stood up and shook my hand. His willingness to follow in the footsteps of Benedict Arnold was stoked when the colonies rejected the offer of self-rule under the Crown. Only infernal radicals would reject such a generous offer. We were in business.

It was no sooner that I moved when I realized that it was he who had trapped me. A group of burly Tory loyalists were coming in my direction. He knew we were coming, and he was expecting me. “You sir are the very traitor to your king that you so obsequiously decry in Washington! You are a damned radical!” Charles not only knew who I was before I even came, through some treasonous network no doubt, but he also seemed to know that I was a dangerous radical underneath a tame personality. It was amazing how little the centuries changed anything. The burly Tories came in my direction, but I had a few surprises for them. Non-lethal weapons were a specialty of friends of mine, and I came equipped with taser like weapons that caused paralysis for up to 24 hours. There were five. I got four of them. The last one swung at me and knocked me down. Being a science nerd, he succeeded in knocking me down. Being a poor white kid from East Oakland ‘hood,’ I succeeded in tripping him and running. Like charge and spin, this fight evened out in the end.

I yelled to Sarah to move but it was too late. She was already bound and on her way to a British prison ship. I knew my history and knew that events in this time loop are predetermined even if freely chosen. What was could not be changed even if free will did exist. I was something less than a man for not saving her. I headed to the wormhole feeling more like a

functionary in a vast government bureaucracy living a meaningless existence in history than anything like a hero. I suited up and went through the wormhole like, well, like someone just following orders. I returned to the Lab and lay the whole night without being able to sleep. The cold debriefing I had with the Project Leader did nothing to help me. Empathy was not his strongpoint. I had to do something for Sarah, but I did not know what. Centuries may have been nothing in terms of cosmic time but for me they were a vast and meaningless expanse.

My next mission would be the most important. I would link myself again with Ben Franklin and enter the very citadel of the Constitutional Convention itself. I was going to make sure that the new Constitution created a strong central government, that Hamiltonian centralism would overcome Jeffersonian agrarianism. I was queasy about the whole thing. It smelled too much of the self-interest of the Suits behind the scenes. The fact suddenly dawned on me. They wanted a future in which militarism would be secure. That is what this was really all about. The human-alien civilization of the distant future was a sure thing. It could not be avoided. Given that, the Suits still wanted to have a militarily powerful human civilization that could negotiate this union from a standpoint of power. Did I really want to go to the past simply to be a functionary of militarism? The aliens were generous enough to share their civilization with the primitives of this planet and what I was doing seemed vaguely subversive if not unkind.

At the Constitutional Convention I would be up against the Jeffersonians, a paradoxical combination of slave owners on the one hand, and genuine democrats on the other hand. Some of the latter group included moderate abolitionists so this was going to be truly a confusion of clashing interests, large States and small, visionaries and knaves, humans and aliens. Yes, aliens would be present. I felt it in my bones that if our side were up to something, the aliens from the future would know about it from their history. There would be aliens showing up to counter my

efforts. I could only imagine what they would look like, or what their ultimate purpose was. I soon found out as I landed in the office of Ben Franklin and found myself in the presence of an oxygen breathing octopus with legs. The creature's brain stem was huge, and could obviously adapt to a number of atmospheres as well as contain the huge brains to have arrived there first. The creature also appeared adept at communicating with the brilliant Dr. Franklin, and apparently at getting invited to the same Constitutional Convention with the off the record guest status that I would be granted. We were not only observers, but full participants. The Squid and I would be the prime movers of American history behind the scenes and yet our names never appeared in history books for hundreds of years.

The creature would be loaded into a crate to be transported easily. I thought it was amazing that with all of their technology they had to travel in such a primitive way. I could simply walk. Each of us would cultivate our respective delegates and practice a bit of diplomacy. My ally would be Benjamin Franklin. The creature's favorite would be John Rutledge of South Carolina. John Rutledge defended Southern agrarianism. This was in the interest of a future civilization that would want humans to be less advanced scientifically and more dependent on them. To my disgust, I also realized that John Rutledge was also a defender of slavery. I knew so little about the morality of the aliens. For all I knew, their planet or planets could be slave societies. The thought made me shudder but I also realized it might be nothing personal. The aliens could just as easily want left anarcho-primitivism among our species as right-wing agrarianism. The point was they wanted our industrial and scientific capacity neutralized as much as possible. In countering them I had to do my job for the good of the country, and for the good of humanity.

The Convention convened while I was dressed in black as “the Professor,” and the alien was in full Squid form. Neither of us appeared in the record but all of the delegates knew who we were and what our purposes were. The Convention proceeded with each of us lobbying our respective allies. I had Washington, Franklin and George Mason on my side for a future of enlightened civilization free of slavery and peacefully exploring space. The arch-capitalist Hamilton took my side out of necessity but remained suspicious. He was a conservative who intuitively sensed that I was a radical at heart; that I did not agree with his vision of a class system. Fortunately he was as against slavery as he was against radical democracy, the first part putting him in my corner. Apparently his arch-nemesis Jefferson was secretly rooting for me behind the scenes but it was engineered that he would remain in France and not have to be seen with me at the Convention so that his agrarian allies would not know he was on my side. I wish I had Paine but there was no chance that he would be invited. A great many lesser known delegates were with the alien because apparently the creature promised them that a defeat of my vision would imply a triumph of their peculiar interests.

The Convention dragged on and on. It was my longest mission and my hottest as the Summer raged on. “Just compromise already!” I wanted to call out many times. There were times I agreed with the agrarians, particularly on the issues of Senate representation and the fact that the new Republic needed freedom of religion. But it was when the question went to slavery that the atmosphere was most tense. John Rutledge stood up and declared that “Religion and humanity have nothing to do with this question.” He maintained that slavery would have to be protected at all costs as a vital economic interest. Benjamin Franklin looked shocked. George Washington scowled at Rutledge. Madison looked uncomfortable. Yet, to my dismay none of them protested. There was a sense of acquiescence to the sins of the world that I understood all

too well in my own compromises with the realities of life, but which never sat easily on my conscience. Could we all be good men living a living death? Why do we not protest? The alien simply stared in a calculating way, as though the cosmos were as indifferent to the suffering slave as we were.

George Mason alone stood up and had enough. "Slavery," he said, "discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor when performed by slaves." Slavery also corrupted slaveholders and threatened the country with divine punishment. "Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of Heaven on a country." We applauded. Someone had finally spoken to what we knew was right. A sense of rightness returned to my mission when I realized that the best of the agrarians and the best of the modernizers would have to be combined in to a humane social order. Paradoxically, I knew that the more humane social order would also possess a sense of patriotic fury that could lead America in to hubris. I also knew that the powerful Federal Union could be used by powerful corporations to work their will on the planet. My mission was a double edged sword. I also knew that every step I took would matter for the future after me even if it did nothing to change the past leading up to my time. I had to do right even if I did not know fully what Right was.

A Constitution was signed, but the Agrarians had their input with a Bill of Rights. The Federalists would resist the idea of a Bill of Rights in the years after the signing of the Constitution but would eventually assent to. Of course, the Federalist opposition to the idea of a Bill of Rights was more staged than reality given that there was already a secret agreement that it would go through. Hamilton and his compatriots would give nonsense sounding arguments to the idea of the Bill of Rights that would actually garner more support for the idea than opposition. They would play their part in order to make sure that no serious opposition to the

idea would arise from anywhere in society, particularly religious citizens who might object to the separation of church and state found in the First Amendment. I gave my full consent to that idea of a written Bill of Rights, realizing how vital a Bill of Rights would be to limiting the power of the State in future centuries. The Squid also gave assent to the idea of a Bill of Rights, in particular a Second Amendment that would limit the power of a standing army. The right to revolution would be enshrined in the new Constitution by the insistence of the Squid and the Agrarians. I had to admit that I was sympathetic to their arguments about a standing army and the growth of tyranny so I did not resist the idea even with my strong pacifist bent. I could not help but to wonder how much the Squid really cared about the liberty of the American citizenry. It seemed as though the alien was more concerned about checking the eventual growth of American military power than any actual agreement with the Agrarians. I did not see too many Squid Aliens joining the NRA and going to the Green for shooting practice. Then again, I did not know enough about their civilization to be sure.

The Squid and I eventually departed for our respective times and out of any recorded history of the founding of America. The Alien lived in the intermediate time between my time and the far distant future of human-alien unity of sophisticated scientists who built the wormholes. Both times were inscrutable, but it appeared as though the aliens from the intermediate time were less altruistic and more self-interested than the aliens or humans of the far distant future. I could chalk that one up to moral evolution, I suppose. The idea also filled me with hope. Perhaps there was a grand design in the wormhole network that I could not fully comprehend. History which seemed so pointless might have a goal after all. My sense of hopefulness sustained itself as I landed in the deep underground of Los Alamos. My mission was over. I had influenced the future for America, for humanity, for military preparedness, for

LANL and its budget. I was supposed to feel good. It was all supposed to have been for the great American values of freedom, democracy and the rights of teenagers to download copyright free copyrighted material. I could not understand why I felt as though the whole experience had somehow been copyrighted by the Suits that would now run America more securely. I remembered John Jay when he walked beside me and repeatedly defended his belief that “those who own the country ought to run it.” What side was I on anyway?

I was numb as I walked to my room. The usual Los Alamos welcome was one of applause mixed with jovial banter. It was what made working there worthwhile even in the midst of my doubts. I knew that the other scientists struggled with similar doubts. Again, weapons scientists are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and friends. We love humanity, animals, plants, and world peace. It is not our fault the politicians cannot get their act together. We do a job. We do not create the world as it is. The day was dark and stormy as I left the lab on an excursion to the Bradley Science Museum. I would enjoy the day there. I walked in to an incredible feeling of history, a feeling of sadness, a feeling of joy at being alive all wrapped in one. Something was missing in my heroism and I knew it. Real heroes do not resign themselves to a past they cannot change and a future that they do not understand. Real heroes make their future and struggle against the inevitable even if it is inevitable. As I walked past the models of old missiles I could feel the past reaching out to tell me something. I did not know what it was telling me but I felt a strong hand reach into my heart and ring it. The past was so filled with war and death, but it had a message none the less. Humanity was not expected to give up and embrace a Universe of meaninglessness. As I looked at the instruments of death I had come to accept as simply part of human existence, as I looked at the grey sky, I realized that the real message of the emptiness was that I needed to be a human being in an inhuman world. It was the

only real heroism I could ever attain. The only way to redeem the jaggedness of life would be to rescue Sarah even if it meant inevitable failure. I could not change the past but my actions would still matter somehow, somewhere, even if in the defeat of despair. I would rescue Sarah and that was that.

I had to plan my actions in the most precise and detailed way possible. That was the way I planned everything. It was what made my planning effective. Sneaking in to the basement of Los Alamos would be easy since I was technically still part of that division. How long I would still be there was open to question since I was making noises about being transferred to UC Berkeley in an academic position and the Boss was starting to make noises about assisting me along with that. If I was going to act, I would have to act fast. I could still enter the underground of the lab fairly easily. It was sneaking aboard a British prison ship that would be hard. Agent 355 died on board that ship---but this was the historical record. We do not actually know what happened to her. For all I know, she left through a wormhole to the future. Or, I might have died in an attempt to save her, an event not entered in to the historical record but which would seal my heroic status as an American legend that encouraged the colonists to revolt. My choices will not change the past or present. But, I knew that they would potentially alter the very distant future that would exist in the human-alien civilization after the wormhole collapsed. My actions would change their world if not mine. My choices would be my mark in the world of quantum indeterminacy that would resume once the time loop collapsed. The network had to collapse at some point. Perhaps the future was waiting for me to do the brave thing for once.

I entered the elevator very nonchalantly. I loved that word “nonchalant.” It made me sound very James Bond. The only thing that stood out was the extra wormhole suit that I would not have to explain away because my clearance was such that no one would question me at this

point. This was not a normal Los Alamos clearance. I was cleared from the highest levels that probable extended in to the White House itself. I was the hero of American history after all. One more heroic mission would not hurt things even if not officially sanctioned. I waited for an empty room before running in to the wormhole and utilizing the guidance system to land exactly the time I landed when interfacing with Agent 355. I knew where the prison ship was and had already marked my path there. It would go through General Washington who would be glad to help.

What I did not know fully was the nature of the prison ship and what it was like. The women's section was not exactly going to be "Chained Heat." Genders were often mixed together and I hesitated to wonder what that would mean for Sarah. I remembered her soft look, her sad eyes, and her lonely longing for a better world. I realized at that moment that she reminded me of another Sarah I knew from my student radical days. She was the only person ever to join my joke cult "Jean-Paul Sartre Died for Your Sins." I inducted her by telling her that she had to admit that her world was absurd and that she did not know Being-For-Itself. It was only through knowing Sartre that she would know salvation from absurdity. He would resurrect some day and conquer death, or at least cleanse the Philosophy Department of Terminal Boredom. I told her I was a Physics major with a philosopher's heart. We made love with the full knowledge that we could bury our differences. I followed the more sacerdotal side of the religion and she favored the Reformed church of Camus. Our schism came with a breakup but I still thought of her years later.

The Sarah on board the prison ship needed me to have a clear head and so I would have to act. A British uniform was not hard to come by. What would be suspicious was if I fell in to Patriot hands. I would need the full support of the General and I got it. Washington was young

and handsome, unlike the tired man at the Convention, and he was glad to hear my plan. I realized that I was standing in the presence of history when I spoke to him. It truly dawned on me that I was speaking to the father of my country and a revolutionary hero; bourgeois yes, but someone then at least one who put his full life on the line and not his pen merely. General Washington set up with help. He would have to resign himself to the official story that Agent 355 died on board ship in order to confirm the historical record. We set off as British soldiers and took our place in line to board the prison barge. It was a lot to focus on one person, but I told them that the historical record could not be altered and Washington had agreed that his top agent was a priority. However much I twinged at the class nature of why he agreed to save her and not soldiers of lower rank, I went along with the prejudices of the past because they were also prejudices of the present and probably the future. I could not make the perfect the enemy of the good when love was concerned. It was love after all.

We boarded the ship without suspicion. I walked down in to the hull of the ship as if I were entering Hades. It reminded me of the disorientation I felt when I was dragged in to the elevator leading to my destiny underneath the lab. But this time I would be in charge of destiny instead of being pushed by it. I wandered through the stench of waste and wasted human potential. Prison was like that regardless of the society or time. Breathing the stench, I realized what a horrible sacrifice these people made so that I could breathe the sweetness of free air. I would do my best for them by remembering them in history, of letting their memory influence my future. I had to snap out of my reverie and act fast. I made it to Sarah's cell and before she could scream out I covered her mouth. I unlocked her chains and set her on her feet. I nodded to her as I aimed my gun in her direction. I was still believed to be a good Tory soldier, an American collaborator, and I could not afford to blow it. I signaled my fellow infiltrators and we

aimed our guns at her as we walked toward the ladder. A British soldier came in our direction and I began to sweat. I realized that the British soldiers themselves were more humane and less brutal than the American Tories, so his accent put me slightly at ease. We verified that we were transferring the prisoner on the orders of Cornwallis himself for a transfer. This was a believable lie since it happened all of the time. Her gender and class would put her at an advantage over most enlisted men.

We were waved off of the ship and started to move fast. It was then that we turned around and saw a horde of British (or American Tory) soldiers coming after us. I hoped against all hope they were British Lobster Backs and not North Carolina Tories with generations of grudges against the Patriot Planters who thumbed their noses at them. We ran and quickly ducked as we readied ourselves for fire. The bullets flew through the trees like rain drops. I could feel the wind and wondered whether I was actually feeling the bullets. I looked at Sarah and huddled down with her as my compatriots returned fire. She was dirty but it still felt good to be close to her. I realized that it was a bold move in eighteenth century society to kiss a lady without invitation but I did so. She returned the kiss to her handsome rescuer. I knew I had something to fight for. I returned volley.

I was not the best shot but General Washington sent his best men. We knocked down most of them and then they waved me on with my rescued captive. We ran through the trees and did our best to make it to liberty. We were fighting for Liberty after all. We held hands as we ran but soon a ghostly figure stood in our way. In my shock and horror I realized it was Charles Worthington, Sarah's Tory cousin. He had a gun in his hand. Sarah turned to me and whispered that he was a regular on board the prison ship. She whispered it like she would whisper a wistful secret to a lover in whose arms she was about to die. It was her way of showing bravery. Jean-

Paul Sartre died for my sins, I recounted. An absurd world turned on him and crucified him but he overcame in the power of philosophy. In my youth I was mocking Christianity but I soon came to understand that the themes of overcoming alienation had a powerful history in Christian mysticism and deep theology. In that moment I became a true believer in the hope of overcoming alienation if not in any kind of religious salvation. I actually wanted Sartre to remove sin from my life. In particular I wanted the sin of cowardice removed. I no longer wanted to be afraid of the meaninglessness of existence. This thing called life had to mean something. Sartre, save me from the Hell of No Exit. Free me from the otherness of other people so I can embrace them as myself. Let the love I have finally found make me realize that Being which can incorporate Nothingness and therefore transcend nothingness. Sartre never was like Eastern mystics. He simply stared at me from the void of my mind and told me that life has only the inherent meaning that I choose. I smiled when I realized that if he were alive today he would say I was on his own, and probably castigate the American Revolutionaries for being so bourgeois as to fail to rally the working class more effectively.

Being on my own, I used the one weapon I could effectively wield. I used words. "Charles," began I, "You must realize that your country requires men who are man enough not to wage war against women." Charles held his gun steady and began, "I know that this war will be lost. His Majesty knows that at the very least Massachusetts will be gone. The South is also arrayed against us given that they never forgave the ridiculous Dunmore proclamation." Dunmore had proclaimed liberty for colonial slaves and alienated substantial numbers of Southern Tories. Many of them became Patriots after seeing the British allying with slaves. "My purpose then will be to become a part of the new state of affairs to come. I will be an agent of influence seated next to General Washington himself if need be." The implications of his

statement were staggering. Charles Worthington intended to become a Tory agent of influence in the new Republic. He would be a conservative force that would make sure that the new nation remained tethered to British institutions, perhaps even a Monarchy. Democratizing tendencies would be downplayed. Listening to his statement on Dunmore, I realized that even the nominal tendency of the British Empire to act against slavery would be retarded by the need to ally with wealthy colonial Americans trying to retain their power. This was the sum of all fears---unless he could be exposed to Washington. As a former Tory who would swear his loyalty to the new nation, Washington might even be eager to court his support once he feigned loyalty to the new nation. The General had to be warned.

Charles continued to talk. I realized what incredible ego he had. Endless ramblings made dealing with him a fate worse than being shot. I knew I had him distracted and could reach for my gun. I did not want to shoot him in front of his own cousin but I could not understand what kind of family man would subject his flesh and blood to the indignities of a prison barge. I pulled my gun and before I knew it I shot his gun out of his hand and it fell in to the bush behind him. I was not an excellent shot, I had to admit. But I made my target this time. I did not want to kill him because I was a pacifist, but I also needed him alive to expose him. Charles showed himself an experienced fighter when he quickly knocked my gun out of my hand and we began to struggle. I had to overcome him, I realized, but his body was bigger than mine. I was a Physicist, a nerd, and a believer in the Risen Existentiality of the French Philosopher. But, I had to win and win I did. A quick punch across his face gave him a justly deserved spasm of pain. I had won and quickly my mates came to tie him up.

A traitor was exposed and he would be hanged. I did not want that, but I had no ability to change anything. I wrote a letter of appeal to Ben Franklin but knew that even my word, the

word of the Professor, would probably not be honored in this matter. Sarah and I were married in the presence of her parents, reconciled to Independence by the treason of their nephew and the gallant nature of the Patriots in her rescue. We were married by a Continental Army Chaplain and we spent the night in a local inn. I explained to her who I was, and that we would have no choice but to go hundreds of years in to her future. As we stood before the wormhole in the presence of the General, the gravity of the situation made its way past any objections she might have thought up to oppose such a barbaric notion. Her mother kissed her and her father hugged her as they realized that her only escape from an inevitable fate was for her to enter the wormhole. Failure to follow that path would mean that her escape could not have happened. Being good Calvinists, they could understand the idea that Free Will could never contradict Determinism in this matter. We would all meet in Heaven, they reckoned as they reminded her to remember her prayers. We left through the wormhole to meet our adventure in a world unknown to the 1700's and even unknowable to me in many ways.

As we re-entered the present, the Boss was standing before me. He was not smiling. I did something any red blooded American man would have done. I saved a beautiful woman and made her my wife. Hell, this was the city that won World War II and heroism should have been understood. Yet, deep in my intuition I realized what I had done. Nothing changed in my own timeline but the influence on the future was immense. Charles would have allied the United States with Great Britain at an early stage. The alliance would have been a profoundly conservative alliance dedicated to privilege, power, and yes, war. The war machine would have been that much more powerful by the present. There might have even been Anglo-American military colonies in space. I put a dent in the influence that military-industrial complex would have over the future, leading to the possibility of a weak junior partnership when the merger with

the aliens finally came. But, I knew in my heart that we would not be weak. While the intermediate future saw manipulative aliens, the distant future that created the wormholes would have aliens and humans far more morally evolved because of the defeat of Charles and everything he stood for. Peace and freedom would be our distant future. We would evolve. I knew it. By the grace of the sexually immaculate St. Foucault I had made a difference!

“Well, my man, you have created quite a conundrum.” This was all the Boss could say. He could arrest me but then all would be known. I could be killed but then the team would know that I was killed for something any red blooded male of any culture would do. This would not do wonders for morale. The last choice was to send me to academia. This was punishment enough for lab scientists on the cutting edge of knowledge. I felt a tinge of pain as the sentence was pronounced upon me that I would be exiled to Berkeley. I wanted this, I wondered. Why was I not happy? I was disoriented but philosophical as the wormhole collapsed, casting aside the past and future from the present. What was done was done. I smiled when I realized that as far as the distant future was concerned the job was done. The Boss scowled when he realized that my deed could not be undone. If I had failed to intervene, Charles would still have been defeated but the manner of its doing would not have influenced the far distant future like that. But, I reasoned, what was done had to be done! The past happened and that was that. Now the wormhole was gone and quantum indeterminacy was back.

The Boss snarled and pronounced one extra sentence upon me. My record of having worked at Los Alamos would be erased. Yes, they could do that. I would have my employment record expunged completely. Instead of Los Alamos Lab, my transcript would say that I taught Middle School Mathematics. I was taken aback. This really was too much. “And, my man, if you make trouble for us we can also erase your transcripts. Yes, we are able to do that so watch

yourself and say nothing about this.” I took my lovely bride and left. Looking into her eyes I realized I had no regrets. We kissed and I went back to my apartment to pack. She had never seen an automobile before and yet she knew what freedom and exhilaration meant. With the top down, she could feel the wind on her as we drove down from Los Alamos to Pueblo of Pojoaque. As we went to Santa Fe, to freedom, to a future as a Professor at Berkeley, I realized what a lucky man I was. I beat time. I beat tyranny. I beat the system. And, I actually created meaning in the world. The lights of Santa Fe were ahead in the beautiful night and I stole a kiss on the cheek. She demanded one on the lips and so I gave it.

Dedicated to the Memory of Jason Zarri, Scholardarity Editor. His untimely death at such a young age was the death of a Philosopher. We will not be the same without him.