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Burning Bridges As We Go
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This Just Ahead

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Excuse me! All of you, settle down! There are plenty of chairs around the table and we have limited time so please sit and let's get started!

Now, General, if you will step up to the podium. For those in the room who do not know him, this is General [redacted], formerly of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President [redacted] and current director of [redacted]. Is that not correct General?

Yes, Ms. Cahill it is.

And according to the certified letter you sent my editors last week, you are requesting an open forum by which any and all willing media agencies, including print, video, and electronic, will be granted an audience in order to hear evidence detailing how the US has engaged in time travel for the last 85 years. Is that not correct, General?

Yes. Roughly since the 1930's.

And in exchange for my paper setting up this press conference, you have granted us sixty minutes of exclusive first look information where we may view the evidence and ask any question we deem fit. Have I summarized our agreement properly?

Yes. Let me add, this is not a hoax. The world truly is in danger. Though of course that is what someone in my position would say. I think the details, the evidence I have, will bear me out. Ironically time is of the essence. I do not know whether my colleagues have learned of my intentions, but it is best to assume they have. And they will most certainly send someone to recover the equipment and shut me down. To discredit me. Or have you question my sanity. Possibly even kill me, but I don't think they will risk that yet. Better to neutralize me by destroying my reputation and insinuate I had a mental breakdown. That sort of thing. But, I digress. My apologies. How they will attack only bears interest to me since I have a background in counterintelligence. That's not pertinent to why we are here today. Please, ask your questions. As promised, I will neither conceal nor refuse to answer. In all truth, I do not know whether any of this can change what is to come. But, if there is a chance, it will happen because someone has heard what I have to say and engineers the solution.

Okay General. Interesting. Now let us go on the record. Our people are looking over your "time travel" equipment which you state, [consulting notes], was first uncovered in 1938 during the Manhattan Project atomic tests in upstate New York.

Well yes and no. The discovery of the equipment dates back to the late 1920's. But we didn't actually start using it till the Manhattan Project. Or to be specific *because* of the Manhattan Project. Oppenheimer and Gethe were trying to produce a self-contained power source strong enough to keep the equipment powered. Till then we had been using more conventional sources which, shall we say, were not sufficient and therefore unsuccessful. The damn thing takes a lot of energy to engage. A little more than 1.21 gigawatts. You might have heard of the Great Blackout of '35 when the entire eastern

seaboard lost power from Pine Camp New York to Camp Blanding in Florida. That happened because we fired up the damn thing and it blew the country's power grid system. We also had to get inventive with covering our tracks on that one. You may recall a certain young CIA operative, known infamously as Orson Wells, who pulled off the War of the World Martian invasion "radio address?" Well, that was the cover story. Something to distract by. But after Oppenheimer and Gethe finished their research, our power sources were no longer problematic. Well, not as problematic. The Manhattan Project succeeded in harnessing atomic energy alright. But it also led to the very lethal atomic bomb. So technically to answer your question, yes, the Manhattan Project signifies the beginning of our successful implementation of time travel.

I see. And how did we invent time travel?

We didn't invent it. We don't know who did. Most of our work has centered on powering it up and using it. The time travel equipment itself, which we call the *LeGuin* by the way, was found by an Army sergeant's 16-year-old son in 1928. He was hiking near his home in Manchester and claimed he found it at the back of an old coal mine buried in a wooden crate. We don't know who specifically built the original, but it has the all the markings of human language and mathematics systems. So we assume it was us. Or at least some earlier ancestral version most likely. The bible refers to "sons of angels" who pre-date most of mankind. Maybe it was them. Or maybe the Egyptians. They were known to work in metal and mathematics. We don't know really. We never could get much further than speculation on that one without disseminating too much information to the public. It's a bit of a "Stargate" theory at this point.

I see. So, General, what have you been doing with the device then? This "*LeGuin*" I believe you called it.

Time travel mostly. And running a counterintelligence unit to cover the work and keep it concealed from our enemies. The CIU. Most of what the public believes, in fact, about UFO's, Area 51, mass conspiracies, and the like initially originated from the creative minds running the CIU office. Very interesting folk. Many go into the movie business after their stretch with the CIU, though they don't really retire. We call on them often, I'm afraid. Time travel, believe it or not, requires a great deal of work to conceal performed by a small band of dedicated people. Actual time travel in and of itself has been a much slower process with decades of trial and error to work out the protocols. But the last fifty years have been very successful, not just in improving the stable projection and retrieval, but in utilizing information recovery to prevent disasters, manmade or natural. Our time travelling has begun to yield some very interesting findings despite the significant quantum interference events we've experienced over the years.

Quantum Interference events, General?

Yes. Explosions, time warps anomalies, mutations, lost personnel in projection. That sort of thing. The first "quantum interference event," which successfully projected a human Quadronaught into the future was captured on film and preserved, but also engineered a huge explosion. That was December of 1941. I couldn't get access to the archive film since it has been stored off site at Fort Knox - some things still being beyond my authority – but it does exist and confirms what I am saying. You can look into it. However, the first time we completed a full human projection and retrieval, we also ended up causing a quantum blowback explosion that killed a lot of people. You might remember it historically as "the Attack on Pearl Harbor."

Wait, what's that about Pearl Harbor, General?

The explosion at Pearl Harbor. Before we moved the whole operation to Groom Lake over in Nevada in the 1950's, we first tried to establish a portable time travel station on the USS Arizona anchored at the then remote Pearl Harbor Naval Station. The idea being we could travel the world while we time traveled the world. Catchy huh. Only an anti-matter drag "mishap" during our active operation blew up the USS Arizona and the entire east side of the island. Which we were able to contain well enough with a dramatic cover story by the CIU. Sadly that cover ended up costing us a great many more lives when we entered World War II with Roosevelt nearly canceling the whole unit operation.

Wait, General? Are you telling us the bombing at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese was a cover story the US government invented in an attempt to cover up a time travel mishap?

Yes. We did time travel successfully though I might add.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor...which led to the US entering the war in Europe and the Pacific Theater? You're saying the Japanese did not bomb Pearl Harbor.

Yes, that's what I am saying. It always amazes me how no one ever questions why the "invasion" stopped at Hawaii after the Japanese had, theoretically, crossed roughly 4000 miles of ocean and "successfully" invaded the naval station there only to turn around and go home. There was a lot more trust in the government back then, I suppose. But, yes, we used the Japanese as a scapegoat - with their emperor's expressed permission by the way - after we promised to share some hefty amount of "advanced" technology with them at a later date. Which they did eventually turn into a very lucrative advantage in the digital watch and radio industry for a time. But yes, the Japanese, or at least those in power at the time, were fully complicit knowing that we had already planned on entering the war in Europe and saw no reason not to take

advantage. President Roosevelt had already spoken to their emperor and his generals in preparation. We just added a secondary goal with the Pacific Theater.

A secondary goal, General, which ended up taking the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers across several continents. Not to mention Japanese civilians who lost their lives in Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

I admit, there were unforeseen consequences to the cover story. Ironically, we had no way of predicting how WWII would take on a life of its own. Or how hard the Japanese would end up fighting back in an effort to double cross us. But thanks to our successful time travel event, we did learn the future held a much worse fate if we didn't stop the Japanese back in '45. Believe me, using the atomic bomb saved more lives than even Truman understood.

Okay, General. Let's put a pin in that one and move on. Tell us about this time travel equipment you brought with you here today.

Yes, of course. Its official nomenclature is the "Quadronautic Projection and Retrieval Systems Prototype." Or "Q-Rep" for short. Though recently a few in-house engineers have taken to calling it "Pandora's Box-Jump." Apparently, they practice cross-fit during their down time and named a WOD after it. You might have heard the rumors.

No, I had not. In your letter, you refer to the device as, and I quote, "a quantum mechanics time travel projection and retrieval program designed specifically to project humans back in time." Successfully I might add. Yes?

Not back in time.

What? I'm sorry?

Not *back* in time. We have not been sending humans back in time, but forward. The LeGuin propels fully grown adult humans - who are officially termed Quadronauts by

the way - *forward* in time. In four-year, spatial time lapse projection and manifestation to be exact. A four-year time leap forward. We have never successfully sent anyone back in time unless you consider those returning from the future as having traveled back in time. Which we do not.

Oh. Okay General. [consulting notes] *Forward* in time. Interesting. To start, I want to understand how you are able to send a human, umm, excuse me, a Quadronaut forward in time. And why in four-year increments.

Of course. Bear with me if I get too technical. Or not technical enough. Time travel is challenging to explain mechanically. But I can give you a general summary of the practical theorem of application.

It works like this. A Quadronaught is cast forward in time using a time flex quantum boost distortion rod called the *Well's Rod*. We then wait a specified amount of time, two hours to be exact, before re-engaging the time anchored, quantum split re-appropriation reel, called the *Orson Reel*. The Quadronaught, who has been linked to the Orson by a neuro-spinal hook, called the *Haldeman Hook*, is pulled back from the future to our present spatial time and reality. The whole device, the *Well's Rod and Orson Reel with Haldeman Hook* is driven by a "time machine" unit termed the *LeGuin Propulsion and Extraction Digressive Pattern Displacement and Reappropriation Unit*. In layman's terms, the LeGuin utilizes 1.21 gigawatts of atomic energy derived from atomic implosion to propel the Well, Orson, and Haldeman units in coordinated fashion into the future resulting in a Quadronaught being cast forward four years in both time and spatial reality. Two hours later, the *LeGuin* re-engages and reels the Quadronaught back from that time and reality to ours. One Quadronaught, one trip. No more, no less.

Umm, Yes General. That is quite the theory. It almost sounds too simple.

Well, no. It's more complicated than that. I was just trying to use a more common analogy. It's much more difficult to explain the scientific mechanics and generally involves interpretive adjustments to string theory within a z-naught framework. A bit beyond my expertise. But the Quadronaught is extremely important after projection when they arrive forward in time. Despite the limitations imposed by the *LeGuin*.

Limitations General?

Yes. Limitations. Or parameters of use if you prefer. Of which the *LeGuin* has four.

Please explain this General.

Well, the first limitation is place. The Quadronaught has to be projected to and from a fixed geographical, contextual reality. Meaning the location they have been projected from geographically is the same location they arrive at geographically four years into the future. Not a problem unless the place they arrive at has changed in that four year time lapse. Sadly, a few Quadronaughts early on suffered significant injury after projecting to the future only to discover a portion of their body embedded inside a cement wall. Or even more horrible, another living being. We quickly solved that limitation though, at least geographically, by always completely controlling the location used during the four year time lapse projection and retrieval for the entirety of the operation forward and back. The CIU occasionally had a few headaches coming up with decent cover stories to cover the cost and span of time involved, but they always seemed up to the task. Roswell being one of my favorite little bait and switch roll outs. As well as Executive Order 13186 which orders federal agencies to protect migratory bird grounds so not too many visitors can snoop around like they did at Roswell. That order deeded us a lot of land and an almost diabolical way to manage tourists, since bird watching is not exactly high on the vacation plans of most Americans, from which to project and recover from.

I see General. And the second limitation?

The second limitation is time itself. The spatial time leap extends forward four solar earth years exactly from the time sent. But here's where that gets interesting. The total number we can project forward is a static 1461 solar days. Always 1461 days. No more and never less. Ever. A very precise number of solar days. Except the LeGuin records it as six years and 1,350 solar days. We puzzled over the difference for some time before we came up with a working theory.

Sorry General, I'm not quite seeing the significance.

The Earth's annual number of solar days are 365 per year plus one leap year every four, yes? Which makes four earth solar years total 1,461 days. But the LeGuin records 1,350 solar days. Which means it looks at a solar year as 225 days, not 365. 225 solar days per year totals 1,350 days at six years. Not 365 for four years.

Still not getting it General.

In a nutshell, we think the LeGuin is recording time by Venetian solar day standard and not Earth solar standard. It isn't random. Which means, as far as we theorize, the LeGuin originated from Venus in some fashion. Not Earth. We can only speculate how it came to be found on Earth and why though.

Ahh, interesting, I think. Got it, General. Very interesting indeed.

Well, we believe so. Quite mind bending when you pull on the threads. We've spent some time trying to learn more but aren't really any closer to knowing anything about the device's history outside of posited theories.

Well General, the Quadronaught themselves must give you a great deal of information I imagine, being time travelers and all.

Not like you would think. That has a great deal of limitation too. Which is what the third *LeGuin* limitation is about. The Quadronaught limitation parameters deal with information retrieval due to physical boundaries concerning organics and non-organics. Essentially, no non-organic, non-living thing can be projected into the future. Not machine, clothing, sensors, recorders, nothing. Hell, not even a simple pencil and piece of paper. Only organic living organisms with higher neo cortex brain functioning capabilities of at least 450cm³. You see, time travel has significant physical impact on all living organisms – none more notable than to executive functioning. It lobotomizes organics with less than 450cm³ cortex neuroplasticity. But those with higher neo cortex ratios fare best. Humans, Risso Dolphins, Killer Whales, and the Western Gorilla survive the trip with only some organic degradation upon return. Ironically, to no understanding on our part as to why, the Red and Green Macaw can travel forward and return without any discernible effect. But getting information from them is, for obvious reasons, impossible. We predominantly utilize human Quadronaughts as our best means of sending and extracting information to and from the future. Information we embed in the Quadronaught through subconscious induction memorization techniques developed by Freud.

Sigmund Freud, General?

No sorry, not Sigmund. His daughter Anna, actually. She was quite a brilliant psychoanalyst in her day. Able to develop and extract some pretty precise information from returning Quadronaughts for many years through her techniques. She was allowed to publish some of her research under the guise of “defense mechanisms.” All protected and developed by the CIU under the cover of “shell shock” to help with veteran counseling, PTSD, and the like. Almost every Quadronaught experiences PTSD in some way for years after. Which brings up the fourth limitation.

The fourth limitation, General?

The fourth limitation also adheres to a specific protocol to protect against catastrophic events of future and past interference. And it mandates time limits best to protect the health of the Quadronaught and preserve information after return.

I think I'm following. But can you explain in more laymen's terms, General?

Sure. Imagine being projected forward four years into the future to one specific geographical place and time for no more than two hours before being pulled back to the present. How much information could you gather? How would you collect it? How far could you get? We have learned to be prepared for the Quadronaughts arrival to maximize the time we have. We put them in a rested, hypnotic state and feed them information sublimely. Not entirely unlike downloading information on a computer so we can communicate results when we send the Quadronaught forward. The future "us" does the same and sends Quadronaughts back with subliminal messaging. Which when retrieved from the future, allows us to make alterations to the future timeline. It has begun working pretty well now and I am proud to say we have less than 25% data corruption in transit. That number was much higher when I took over the program. Simple as that. One Quadronaut, one trip, four Earth years to the day, date, and time in the future. Message sent. Message received upon return.

General, that sounds...almost too science fiction.

It is. I thought so too when I first heard of it. Even after I saw the device in action, I had difficulty accepting what I saw. But much can be seen and learned within a four-year projection mark. Even in two-hour windows. In the last fifty years, we have successfully received information from the future about the aftereffects of many human conflicts: the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the Balkans, Russia's Nuclear program, Reaganomics, the Bosnian war, and so on. With those tidbits of information,

we were able to either minimize or divert what was sure to be some very nasty outcomes for the world population. To prevent the apocalypse essentially.

Really? It occurs to me, being a reporter, there is little way to verify this information. How do we know such a thing is possible? Especially if you, successfully as you say, altered the future timeline to prevent catastrophe? How do you know you're not actually making things worse?

Good questions all. It gets very twisted when you pull on the threads. All I can say now is we have successfully prepared for or avoided several catastrophes both natural and man-made as a result of the information exchanged. Too much to explain all here. We also gained a great deal of science and technology data through a Schrodinger's Cat, enigmatic loop sort of way. And, I like to think, with our medical Quadronaught experiences, we have improved the lives of countless Americans through medical breakthroughs originally developed to heal Quadronaughts post-transport. Believe me, it all gets mind boggling and takes a lot of organizing. Not to mention it being very much a question of would it have happened if we had not known it would happen sort of thing. Very Neo-matrix. It helps to have Quadronaughts with high intellectual abilities and eidetic memories. And we developed a specialized "think tank" of people to theorize on just these issues.

Anyone we would know, General? Any famous Quadronaughts you can share the names of? Or do you mostly recruit from the military and federal agencies?

We do mostly pull from the military. The regular cast of characters you might expect, pilots, Special Forces, and the like. The military is generally the most efficient in recruitment, training, and conditioning. Not to mention secrecy and liability waiver requirements. Neil and Buzz are fairly successful examples. As is Colonel Oliver North. Ironically, we excluded Elon though he's been begging to be part of the

program. Too much ego there, not enough neuroplasticity, as we like to say. We also, when merited, pull from the scientific community in specific cases for specific objectives. Carl Sagan, during the 1970,'s was one such recruit and one of the best Quadronaughts we ever had despite the obvious impact on him. He's still valuable when he participates in our think tank models. But he's also the reason we have iron clad, four trip maximum protocols. He suffered extensive physiological effects exceeding three to the power of three. We learned the hard way, but his first four trips remain the gold standard, nonetheless.

Wow, General. That's quite the revelation. Even for an afternoon of revelations. Okay, let's talk more about time travel and your Quadronaughts.

Well, for all our successes, we learned most lessons the hard way. Through consequences. Much more than I care to admit since the comparative of what we learned - in contrast to the impact on the Quadronaught - were not always of equal value. We've been able to nearly eliminate death from the consequential side effects list, but not the physiological impact.

What are the effects, General?

Well, in layman terms, when a Quadronaught returns, it looks like someone who has had a stroke resulting from a drug overdose. It takes a trained and healthy Quadronaut about two weeks to recover from their trip just so we can debrief them as to what they have seen, heard, and learned. Apparently, the brain and body have a fairly decent amount of plasticity toward time displacement, but not all Quadronaughts recover. There are side effects, depending on the Quadronaught's genetic genealogy and conditioning. Marfan syndrome, Alpha-1 antitrypsin syndrome, that sort of thing genetically. But the immediate physical side effects are minimal if the Quadronaught remains in good shape and does not exceed four trips. Recovery is fairly assured then.

What happens after four trips, General?

It gets ugly. Very disturbing. Passing the post-four trip limit seems to have a potentiating effect on the Quadronaught physically, mentally, and psychologically. Every problem is magnified to the nth degree and exacerbated by an almost unstoppable breakdown to their physiological systems. Like a runaway train flying off a collapsed bridge. We only have a very short window to stop the impact. Honestly, we have a great deal of research into this area for the obvious reasons. A side effect which has also benefitted the medical profession. But to achieve our goal of fully conscious interaction with past and future paradigms through collaborative communication, we need to find a way to elevate the human condition. Right now we are still sort of stuck in the cave man using rough, improvised tools era. But our goal is to open the door and have complete control and embodiment of the process in real time both forward and past. Basically, we want to keep the door open and simply talk back and forth with our future and past selves. Which hasn't yet happened directly.

Again, that is some tale General. If what you're saying is true, time travel sounds not only very dangerous but ridiculously limited. Especially considering, as you said, even your own people do not understand the complete technology behind it? How can this be then? How did we invent time travel machines if we do not understand how time travel works?

Well, the most direct answer, the Ockham's razor if you will, is we are not the intended being meant to use it. It was created by some other being and never intended for our use. Or it was, but we are mis-using it for time travel when it was designed to be something else - like using a calculator to tell time. By using the equipment blindly, we are essentially messing around with something we never should have had in the first place. Like a monkey discovering a running car in 1850 and trying to drive it around the jungle. But we're the human race. We tend to do things that defy sense and reason.

And we may very well have pushed it to the limit this time and brought the Domsday clock to zero.

How so General?

The LeGuin no longer works. Well, it works, we just haven't been able to send any Quadronaughts into the future for some time now. And the last successful trip we did complete may very well have revealed the alarming details of our doom. We are on a countdown to Armageddon and are blind for the first time in a long while, futuristically speaking, because the LeGuin won't work.

That's very alarming General. How so?

In January 2016, a CIU operative posing as a biochemical professor in Boston and a triathlete, was acting as a double agent with China's Wuhan Laboratories, when he was projected forward to 2020 and discovered the lab was in lock down for a mysterious virus. That mysterious virus became known worldwide as the Covid-19 variant of Sars II resulting in a worldwide pandemic till 2021. We did our best to warn the appropriate agencies beforehand without exposing where the information came from. We had particular difficulty with the then-sitting president and his, shall we say, less than orthodox ways. He was a pretty big lunkhead about the whole thing. Though in all fairness, there was a very sensitive issue considering HOW we gained the information. As such, not too many people believed us. Not even the president who knew more than most about what we were doing.

I'm not seeing the issue, General. We survived the pandemic.

No, that wasn't the issue. The problem is our last piece of information disseminated from the future indicates we do not survive after November 2024, after we re-elect former President Trump. Everything goes black in 2025. We have continued to send Quadronaughts forward in 2017 to 2021, 2018 to 2022, 2019 to 2023, and 2020 to 2024, so

we know the nations of the world and its people survive the worldwide pandemic, but trouble starts brewing by the end of 2023. Civil unrest, global wars, famines, you name it. The breakdown to society on a global scale. What the bible referred to in Mark as "the beginning of the birth pains." All capped by the last info we received from the future - that Trump had returned and was actively courting Armageddon with his policy decisions on global matters. We keep trying to send Quadronaughts forward, but as of January 2021, when we tried to project a CIU operative forward to January 2025well, she just wouldn't go. Not her, not the equipment, not a single projection. She wouldn't project period. Everything was correct according to protocol, and the LeGuin fully operational, but she just wouldn't advance forward in time or geographical space. At first we thought it might be a new anomaly for Quadronaught projection. We switched up Quadronaughts and tried again. With the same results. We tried nearly two dozen current and former Quadronaughts and not a single successful projection after January 2021 projected into 2025. Which means we are dark past 2024. We are blind for the first time in a very long time.

So what does that mean exactly, General?

I don't know, really. Could be nothing and could be Armageddon. We've relied on future information to prevent tragedy for some time so I'm not sure we know how to do so in the dark anymore. The CIU is better at creating franchise movies now than actual politic operative work like we did during the cold war. Or somewhere in between. There are theories, of course, but we really don't know what it means. Ockham's razor posits we have incurred a global war that destroys mankind. Global war. The Doomsday clock reaches zero. Or a few of our more religious minded people claim the tribulation having occurred. Carl S. simply thinks the quantum celestial batteries on the damn thing wore out and need to be replaced. Ever the practical thinker that one. But

we wouldn't know how to change the damn batteries even if we knew that was the issue. For several years now we have tried and haven't been able to solve the problem.

So General, if your think tank, your scientists, and all your brilliant minds can't figure it out, what do you think the general public can do.

You're my Hail Mary. The one thing that could save us if even possible. We tell everyone, and I mean EVERYONE from every continent, country, farm and dell, everything. We go completely open. Share all information. Everything. It may truly be a long shot, but I believe this may be our only chance. We have till November 2024. If enough people believe - hell, even if they don't believe - but are willing to act, we may be able to change our destiny.

The second thing we need is to implement global peace immediately. Take the Doomsday clock off the table all together and eliminate the possibility a manmade disaster caused the end of the human race. Then we figure out what is going on with the LeGuin mechanically. Everyone everywhere needs to give up any designs they may have for power, money, and land, and simply save us from us. We basically create utopia and hope it gives us time to figure what the problem with the LeGuin is.

You're kidding, right General. That's not a small feat to accomplish.

No, I couldn't be more serious. It is the only way I know that could possibly work. Or at least extend us enough time to figure things out. And it all starts with me opening up the doors to a secret we have held for a long time.

Well, General.....

I'm sorry Ms. Cahill. I just happened to look out your window here and can see quite a few unmarked black SUV's pulling up to the front of the building. I believe our time

together has come to an end. You might want to alert your people. I will be taking the equipment now and be leaving.

End of Interview.

Author P.S. My original thought was to write a short story using just dialogue about the end of the world. No exposition. Just a survivor's account of what led to the end. I was also fascinated by the idea of severe limitations to time travel and what that would look like in real terms if we could only get brief bits of information. But I found adding an interviewer helped keep the story more engaging and a pre-Armageddon story more appealing. With a little politics thrown in to express my exasperation with the troubling direction our society seems to be heading in.