

The Prestige of a Time Traveler

by CV Parameshwaran

It was going to be an exciting day. Working with Astrophysicist and proclaimed Vedic Scientist Professor Venkat Ramani, we were on the cusp of his breakthrough invention – THE TIME MACHINE, aptly named KRISHNA. A bold inscription of one of Krishna's quotes from the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita was etched on the surface of the machine.

“Time I am, destroyer of the worlds, and I have come to engage all people.”

After Oppenheimer made the atomic bomb, he similarly used this same quote making this one of the most well-known quotes of Gita.

Despite the tense situation in the room, the professor seemed profoundly calm and collected. For this first attempt at time travel, he had chosen Revathi - his pet cat, joking that of all animals a cat's nine lives would be useful in this journey. As he carefully entered data into his quantum computer, aided by artificial intelligence, my gaze quickly swept across the room. Such a historic moment and the professor had not even invited the media or spoken about his invention with his peers. Throughout his career, he always followed the principles of a true scientist, believing science should be used only to benefit humanity, and not for personal gain. For this major historic event in his field, he only invited a few of his fellow researchers and students, who were all very excited to see history being made.

After uttering a small prayer, the professor carefully placed Revathi in a giant structure resembling a Ramada covered with wires. The structure began to buzz with energy as he pressed the red button. This immediately reminded me of the Tesla device from the cult movie *The Prestige*, and we could see the solid cat slowly dissipate into transparency. Just before it fully vanished from the stage, we could see another cat appearing, just a few meters away out of thin air. We had just witnessed a successful time trip and the cat was astonishingly still alive. There was a brief moment of stunned silence before we all burst into loud cheers.

But before the celebrations got going, we heard a gunshot, which quickly silenced the space in a very unsettling way. Thomas Roe, an exchange student from EIC College in London, was the instigator. He ordered the professor to quietly hand

over the control of the time machine to him. With a loud proclamation, he declared, "I'll abscond with your research and build this time machine on my own, with the intent of using it exclusively for my personal gain".

With the menace of a gun looming, the professor complied in silence, while we, in a state of helplessness, observed Thomas inputting the present room coordinates and a date from six months back into the time machine. He asked the professor to hit the red button. The professor implored him to reconsider his choice and, with an angry tone, cautioned that he was embarking on a perilous path that would ultimately result in his doom. Wearing a cynical smile, Thomas made a threatening gesture towards him and retorted, "Throughout history, individuals like me have been appropriating ideas and theories. Perhaps you should have focused more on your history lessons than on science".

The professor, who looked visibly irritated by this comment, pressed the red button. We saw Thomas dissipate slowly in front of our eyes and, with his disappearance, we realized the magnitude of what had just transpired. One of the greatest inventions of our times just got stolen in front of our eyes. I looked at the professor who was glancing at his computer and his watch and he quickly went to the chalkboard and wrote in big letters, some coordinates.

Latitude 52° 12' 21" N, Longitude - 0° 7' 4.7" E. – June 28, the year 2060 – 5 PM.

SAT-LONG (deg)	ELEVANGLE (deg)	AZANGLE (deg)	HA (hrs)	DEC (deg)	SLANT (km)	GND (km)
42.0	4.0	278.1	5.487	4.70	41236	8607

He turned around to us and told us that we should all take note of this number since Thomas just made a huge scientific leap and had created history by being the first human being to time travel. Where I assumed he would be visibly furious, I saw the professor grin. In a very calm tone, he informed us that we had been witness to not only a great event but a great lesson.

“The first lesson is in Einstein’s theory of general relativity. The Earth revolves around the Sun and our solar system itself orbits around the Milky Way. The whole galaxy itself is moving through the cosmic universe. Everything in the universe is, therefore, in motion. All these movements would have to be considered for safe time travel, regardless of the reference points used. The point

on the Earth where we currently are, is roughly 1.6 million miles away from its location, since just yesterday.

The second lesson is on Newton's third law of motion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction", which we refer to as Karma in Vedic literature. For his actions, Thomas will now be a meme for all future time travelers. If they point their telescope at these coordinates in the sky, they will be able to see a small human appear in space out of nowhere and explode within seconds in the vacuum of space or they will see him freeze up, depending on the air in his lungs. If they capture him at the right moment, they might even be able to picture the confused last looks on our now departed unscrupulous time traveler."

As he started disassembling his apparatus, he said, "Don't forget, tomorrow we discuss the Grandfather Paradox and Predestination Paradox. And, if anyone can help me solve one of those, I will give them the clue as to how my Krishna survived the time travel."

Appendix:

- *Like all my other stories, the purpose of this story for me is to raise awareness and in this case, this story was written to hopefully get my son Arnav and other children his age more interested in science and the wonders of science.*
- *Prestige (as shown in the movie The Prestige) is the last act of any magic trick. First comes The Pledge: The magician shows you something relatively ordinary, like a dove. Second is The Turn: The magician takes the dove and makes it do something extraordinary, like make it disappear. But what really wows the audience is the Prestige, where the audience wonders how this trick was done.*
- *As he witnessed the first detonation of a nuclear weapon on July 16, 1945, a piece of Hindu scripture ran through the mind of Robert Oppenheimer: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds". It is, perhaps, the most well-known line from the Bhagavad Gita, but also the most misunderstood due to a lack of proper understanding of Hindu philosophy and the Sanskrit language.*

- *Latitude 52° 12' 21" N, Longitude - 0° 7' 4.7" E. – June 28th, the year 2009 – 5 PM.*

These are real coordinates given to prospective time travelers by renowned scientist Stephen Hawking for a party he hosted. He only sent the invitation a few days later so that only time travelers would know about this party. No one showed up though. In this short story, this coordinate was used to show the place where Thomas jumped from, and the next coordinates show where we can see him through a telescope in space if we need to see him (that's a fictional space since I myself have not solved exact science of time travel yet.)

- *All the paradoxes mentioned are real-time travel paradoxes.*
- *In the sci-fi/thriller/suspense movie The Prestige by acclaimed director Christopher Nolan, one of the most prominent scientists of all time, Nikola Tesla, is shown, and in the movie a very similar device is used to create a magic illusion using a black cat as the first living object to be tested.*
- *Just like the magic trick, the final act or Prestige is not revealed to the readers, about the cat not having the same fate as the protagonist. Though like all magic tricks, the explanation is very simple and would ruin the surprise.*
- *This is my third story written for Story Slam. The first story took the reader to my past, the second story is more of a current version of events and this story takes the readers to the future, since this is a sci-fi based in the year 2060.*
- *For successful time travel, you not only need the exact coordinates but the exact time as well, so basically we would require all four dimensions accurately to time travel safely. If we get even one dimension wrong it could lead to catastrophe which is normally not shown in the movies. Also, time travel to the past is a lot harder than time travel to the future for various reasons.*