

Tempus Fu*it

A treatment for a full-length film

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Believing his business partner absconded with an invention that can reveal the future, a determined scientist embarks on a frantic search with the help of his partner's wife with whom he was once romantically involved.

Act I

The time is 1999, the place is Silicon Valley. Inside an auditorium an extremely boring business meeting is underway – a strategy pep-talk perhaps – led by a corporate suit. Most of the employees in the audience are dressed for business, but not Chris Hahn, a thirty-something scientific programmer who dresses more like a computer hacker than a company man. He's about to doze off at the stultifying presentation by a corporate suit when Morty Klein taps him on the shoulder seeking his attention. Morty is a few years older and less fit than Chris, and he too does not look like the company-man type, for, like Chris, he also works on the R&D side of things. Chris turn to Morty who asks, "Had enough of this?" Chris most certainly has. "Step outside with me for a sec.," says Morty, "I have something to tell you."

In the hallway outside the auditorium Morty announces that he's finally secured financing to start up a new company, Morque Technologies, and he wants Chris to join him. Chris's first reaction is one of surprise that Morty successfully secured capital. He's flattered by Morty's offer, but demurs; although not particularly happy with his job nor is he highly-compensated, Chris

is secure in his current position with the firm. Morty presses him, refusing to take “no” for an answer. Chris is a brilliant programmer, and Morty wants him. Research Chris has pursued could accelerate the success of Morque Technologies. Stalling for time, Chris says he’ll think about it – gotta run it by the wife, etc. – and goes back into the meeting which seems not to have progressed one bit. The sad look of boredom on the faces of the captive company men disturbs him. Chris steps back into the hallway and says to Morty, “When do we start?”

It’s now eight years later, and Morque Technologies is a reality, but judging from the condition of the building in which Morty and Chris work, things are not going swimmingly. Chris, now in his early-40s but still boyish looking with his full head of hair, hunches over a computer screen immersed in programming. Morty, early-50s, thinner hair and expanded waist, stands off to the side out of Chris’s view. Morty quietly clasps his briefcase and makes a move for the exit. A time-clock on the wall clicks to 8:00 PM which breaks Chris’s attention. He looks over his shoulder just in time to see Morty creeping away. Chris challenges Morty, “Where the hell you are going?” Morty explains that he’s off to meet Arielle Cowan, Morque Technologies’ pretty business manager. Chris grows indignant that Morty is leaving him alone to slog along for another several hours on their elusive invention. But when Morty belated adds that he intends to ask Arielle to marry him, Chris is truly shocked. His stammering

response suggests he is troubled by the news and that perhaps he and Arielle may have once had a thing between them. After Morty leaves, Chris blurts out, “Selfish bastard. Has to have everything for himself.” Exhausted from coding all day Chris rummages through a pile of mail. As he does this, a mechanical hum from out of the blue momentarily distracts him. Chris picks up a copy of “Time” magazine from the pile. On the cover: Vladimir Putin, Man of the Year. Chris remarks to himself, “Vladimir Poon-tang? They named that Cossack man of the year? Jesus H. Christ.” This sarcastic observation and the mysterious mechanical hum will play a role later in the movie.

Some days later, Chris meets Arielle for lunch at a diner where he expresses disbelief tinged with sadness that she would accept Morty’s proposal of marriage. Chris recalls the romantic delight he and Arielle once shared, hoping the memories will change her mind. Arielle responds with two practical observations: Morty, a recent widower, has money, and Chris, a married man, won’t leave his wife. Chris pleads and grumbles to no avail.

Jump ahead two years. Chris and his wife Lori have dinner with Morty and Arielle to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of Morque Technologies, although the mood is a bit somber. After a decade of hard work, success with their invention has eluded the two partners. When Arielle proposes a toast – “To Morque Technologies – another ten years” – Chris recoils. A little

drunk, he lets it be known a bit too loudly that he can't fathom working another ten months on the project, let alone ten more years. Morty, who is as optimistic as Chris is pessimistic, tries to buck up his partner. "Have patience. You don't want to stop now. I have a good feeling we're getting close." Morty adds that the investors – a group of Arabs based in Abu Dhabi – are getting antsy to see results, so now is not the time to slack off. Arielle seconds the notion which irritates Chris, and he makes a nasty comment to the effect that as a mere business manager, Arielle has no clue how difficult the enterprise is. Morty is not pleased with Chris's snide remark. On the sidewalk outside the restaurant, Morty chides Chris. "Try to be a little more civil. You two used to get along so well." Chris replies, "Yeah, you're right. We did."

Flashback several years earlier. Chris and Arielle, completely alone, walk hand-in-hand together in a forest of Sequoia trees. The young lovers speak about a future together. Chris resolves to break up with Lori to be with Arielle. Passion ensues.

Back to the present, following the dinner with Morty et.al. As Chris prepares for bed he complains to Lori about his disgruntlement over working at Morque Technologies under Morty's direction. But when Lori proposes he find another job, Chris recognizes the futility of making such a move. He's invested so much time and energy into the project that he feels trapped by it. And

Morty's regular prognoses of success sitting right around the corner continue to tantalize Chris with the promise of riches.

The next evening Chris is hard at work as usual. He sits at a lab table tinkering with a triangular, metallic object with a greenish surface. It's the device the two scientists have been working on for a decade: a thing they call the Pentachoron. Chris attempts to insert a rod through the greenish surface but is rejected. The Pentachoron emits a horrid screech whenever Chris probes. Chris fiddles some more, and with each subsequent rejection he becomes more irate, swearing like a crazy man. Morty, who sits nearby making notes in a lab book, is unfazed by Chris's outbursts – he's heard them a thousand times. Around midnight, Morty leaves while Chris slogs on, making adjustments to the Pentachoron and typing on a laptop that is connected to it. Hours later, Chris probes the Pentachoron with the rod; this time he is met not by an annoying screech but with a pleasant hum – the same hum he heard earlier, but he doesn't connect the two events. Instead of being rejected, the rod can be inserted deeply through the greenish surface. Chris is ecstatic at the possibility that the Pentachoron might actually be working. He urgently calls Morty back to the lab.

Reunited, Morty and Chris anxiously prepare for the first full-fledged test of the Pentachoron. Chris places the device onto a stand on the lab table while Morty sets up lights and a video camera. As this goes on, Morty comments,

“Y’know, if this works we’re going to be multi-millionaires.” Then for the first time the purpose of the Pentachoron is revealed: it is a device for transporting objects into the past – a time machine of sorts. When functional, objects inserted into the Pentachoron would appear at a different point in time. Chris and Morty banter the ethics of placing objects into the Pentachoron; Morty sees value in righting the wrongs of the past whereas Chris believes mere observation of events of the past is most appropriate use. Morty notes the real payday for Morque Technologies will come when the Pentachoron can be used to examine the future. Chris dissuades Morty that such a payday is close at hand. “We’ve spent a ton of other peoples’ money and untold man-hours just trying to get this thing to send objects into the past.” He adds unconvincingly, like Pinocchio, “Looking into the future is a long way off.” Changing the subject quickly, Chris jokingly suggests Arielle already knows how she’ll spend all of her husband’s proceeds, to which Morty responds, “Well, that’s why they invented offshore accounts.” And as soon as he says it, he regrets it, as that information is not for public consumption.

Morty announces the video equipment is ready to record the first test. Chris picks up a long, slender probe which has a small video camera on the tip. He holds the tip in front of his face, the image of which is displayed on a large TV monitor. Chris speaks into the tip, and as he speaks, his image and words are

projected on the monitor. "OK, Morty. Here we go." Chris carefully and gently inserts the slender tube into the greenish surface, and as he does the Pentachoron emits the electronic hum. The monitor displays a colorful snowstorm of noise, then suddenly an image appears. On the monitor: Chris, looking ten years younger, sitting on a stool and staring at the cover of Time Magazine from 2007. Then Chris on the monitor comments, "Vladimir Poon-tang? They named that Cossack man of the year? Jesus H. Christ."

The two scientists are dumbstruck.

Following the successful first test of the Pentachoron, Chris throws a barbecue for a few friends and relatives. Actually it's more Lori's idea – having suffered penury along with her husband Chris for so long, she wants to celebrate a rare step forward for Morque Technologies. The guests have arrived and the food is served. Mid-way through the feast, Lori informs the guests that Chris has made a major breakthrough, although she quickly admits she has no idea what it entails. She calls on Chris to take some well-earned kudos. "Tell them about it honey. Don't be shy." Chris demurs. Lori presses on, "C'mon. Tell them what you did, honey." Before Chris can respond, his father-in-law, Bernie, butts in provocatively. "Yes, Chris, tell us what you did."

Chris knows he's in for a confrontation. Bernie has long held his son-in-law in quasi-contempt from the beginning for not being good enough for his daughter. And after Chris quit the safety of a Fortune 500 career to embark on an elusive invention in a tiny firm that could not adequately compensate him, Bernie's animosity toward him redoubled. But following the incredible success of the Pentachoron test, Chris is ready for bear. Serious consumption of beer has also gotten him in the mood for a fight. Chris starts off civilly, trying to explain the breakthrough without compromising trade secrets, but Bernie hits him hard with sarcasm. Chris is so infuriated with the patronizing tone from his father-in-law that he blurts out confidential information: "We proved our device can transport objects through time - into the past! We can look into the past!"

Take that! Chris scans the table for a positive reaction, but expecting awe he is met instead with stares from the guests that suggest they think he's out of his mind. After a moment, Bernie pipes up. "Wait, did I hear you right? You're building a time-machine? Oh, for Chrissake. I suppose you built a perpetual motion machine, too, while you were at it." Bernie and his wife Marjorie laugh heartily along with a few others around the table. Lori looks down at her plate and chomps somberly on an ear of corn. Chris is pissed, and silence dominates the picnic tables set up in Chris's back yard. Then, Chris's only child, an intelligent and thoughtful thirteen-year old son named Albert (after Einstein)

breaks the ice. "Will you be able to send objects into the future too, Dad?"

Thoroughly disgusted with the entire inquisition, Chris ignores his son's entreaty.

Now fairly drunk, after all the guests have left, Chris takes out his frustrations with Bernie on Lori. He acknowledges that his hatred for Bernie stems from Bernie's rejection of Chris's request years ago for a loan to buy into Morque Technologies at its founding. Ten years later, absent a buy-in from Chris, Morty owns the majority of the enterprise while Chris is basically an employee, instead of a major stakeholder. As usual, Chris and Lori tussle, ending with Lori heading off to bed and Chris grabbing another beer.

Chris stumbles into Albert's bedroom and wakes his son. Chris feels obligated to smooth out the lumps created by his verbal altercation with Bernie at the barbecue. "Don't pay attention to your dopey grandfather. He just likes to pick on me a little." Albert looks at his father like a sad puppy dog. "Dad, will you be able to send objects into the future?" Chris hesitates, then relents.

"Y'know, I'm not supposed to talk about it. Even with family. But you were the only one at the table this afternoon who asked an intelligent question." Feeling an obligation to reveal the truth, Chris confirms that the ability to send objects into the future – contrary to what he's led Morty to believe – is imminent. He explains that the ability to send objects into the future could be used as a bargaining chip with Morty to increase Chris's stake in the company. Albert is

impressed. Chris goes on to mention accidentally the code name of the device – Pentachoron – despite this being a taboo which both he and Morty agreed upon. Having said too much already, Chris tucks his son into bed.

Later that same evening, with Lori sound asleep, Chris makes a clumsy visit to Arielle under the drunken delusion he still has a chance with her. Now that the Pentachoron works, figures Chris, Arielle should be mighty impressed with his brilliance – and perhaps see him and not Morty as the real money-maker. Of course, Arielle is not pleased with Chris's presence at this late hour, and in an inebriated condition. Arielle points out that Chris is fortunate Morty is out of town in Seattle, lest her jealous husband get all bent out of shape over the unannounced late-night visit. Chris presses on, recalling their past love affair, trying to talk his way into Arielle's bedroom, making an ass of himself. Arielle pleads with him to go home, and as she does so Chris stumbles backward into a hedge. Entangled in the bushes, crying, Chris's pathetic predicament disarms Arielle. She helps extract her former lover and brings him into the house.

The following morning, Chris is back home in his bed, writhing and jerking from what might be a bad dream. The phone rings, startling Chris out of his turbulent slumber. It's Morty. Chris's face belies panic. Did Arielle mention last night? Did Morty somehow find out about Chris's unauthorized revelation of the secret Pentachoron to his moronic relatives at the picnic? Chris asks Morty

sounding guilty, “Uh, why’re you calling? Did I do something... is something wrong?” Morty responds that the reason he’s calling is to ask Chris to travel to Abu Dhabi to meet with the Arab investors and reassure them that the Pentachoron project is moving along nicely. Normally this would be Morty’s responsibility as the CEO, but he tells Chris that he can’t take long flights for a while – doctor’s orders. Chris feigns excitement about representing the company to the investors, but he’s not happy about traveling half way around the world. And when Morty adds that he has to go tomorrow, Chris is downright glum.

Chris climbs into the attic to retrieve his rarely-used luggage. He calls out for Albert to help him schlep the bags down, but his son is busy texting his pal Declan about the cool thing his father invented. As Chris packs for the big trip, he makes a “Hail Mary” call to Morty for permission to upgrade his flight to Business Class, but Morty denies it. “Man, I don’t know. We’re really hurting on cash flow,” whines Morty. Although he knows getting an upgrade out of his miserly partner was a longshot, Chris is pissed. He angrily packs the last of his stuff.

Meanwhile, at Morty’s house, as Arielle tries to get Morty ready for a planned trip to Napa, she inquires about the call that just came in. Morty mentions Chris’s request for a seat upgrade which invites Arielle to raise concerns about Chris and his potential drag on Morque Technologies. She

advises Morty to be careful. “Now that the invention works, why don’t you ease him off the project, before he tries to renegotiate his contract, or demand a bigger share, or hold the device hostage until he gets what he wants.” Morty isn’t going for any conspiracy theories proposed by Arielle. He defends his long-time partner: “Don’t read too much into his eccentricities. He’s a loyal guy. We wouldn’t be where we are without him.” Frustrated, Arielle pushes Morty to get ready for the Napa trip, but as a devoted scientist he can’t resist going to the lab instead, which only adds to her annoyance with Chris.

On a sidewalk outside SFO Lori drops off Chris and his bulky luggage. He proceeds through the security checkpoint and suffers some humiliation as the TSA agents get meticulous on his ass. He finally boards the flight to Abu Dhabi, occupying a tight middle seat near the back of the plane, sandwiched between two slabs of fat.

As Chris is undergoing modern-day torture at the hands of a major airline, Albert has caught up with his juvenile-delinquent buddy Declan behind an abandoned gas station. Each boy straddles a bicycle. Skinny, fourteen-year-old Declan is dressed in filthy jeans and a wife-beater, and sports a home-made haircut. He has picket-fence teeth and smokes a cigarette. Albert wants to tell the tale of the Pentachoron and its marvelous function, partly to brag but mostly to earn some respect from Declan. “My dad says you put an object into

it and it comes out in a different time." Intrigued, Declan first asks then demands to know where the Pentachoron is. Feeling pressured, Albert says the device is in his father's lab. Declan pushes for more detail, and as Albert hesitates, rocking back and forth on his bicycle, Declan blows smoke in his face. "C'mon, dick, just tell me where the freakin' thing is." Feeling threatened now, Albert capitulates, "It's a big gray building down by the Red Lobster," adding belatedly that the lab is always locked. Declan's persistent questions concern Albert that the boy is considering thievery; perhaps mentioning the security system at the lab will dissuade Declan from trying to steal the Pentachoron.

Morty is at the lab messing with the Pentachoron in preparation to run some tests. The TV monitor is powered on and Morty wields the probe. He clicks some commands into the laptop, then inserts the probe into the Pentachoron. It produces the hum as before. After a moment an image of Morty as a younger man sitting at his desk appears on the monitor. Morty giggles with excitement. "Look at me! I'm ten years younger! And 50 pounds lighter!" Morty extracts the probe, and the monitor goes back to displaying noise. Morty types some more commands into the laptop and inserts the probe again. This time the monitor displays Chris sitting at the lab table while Arielle arranges items in a supply cabinet. Each appears several years younger. On the TV, Arielle says "When I'm done here, I'll pick up those tools you ordered, Chris." Chris replies,

“Thanks, Arielle. You’re a peach. Having you around as business manager is gonna be a treat.” Morty smiles appreciatively at the once-pleasant interaction between his two employees. The monitor displays Arielle walking toward Chris. Just then, Morty’s laptop makes a ping sound which draws his attention away from the TV monitor momentarily such that he misses seeing Arielle respond favorably to a pat on her ass from Chris as she walks by.

Act II

After a brutal flight, Chris finally arrives in the Middle-Eastern emirate of Abu Dhabi where the temperature is about the same as a pizza oven. A cab driver shuttles Chris to a terrible hotel located in an industrial area on the outskirts of town; a hotel reserved for him by business manager Arielle. Chris suspects Arielle chose the crappy hotel to bust his balls.

Once settled, Chris checks in with Morty who informs him that the head of the investment firm, Sheik Anas El-Khoury wants to come to the United States next week to tour the lab and see a demo of the Pentachoron. Morty instructs Chris to stall El-Khoury; he doesn't want the Arabs around while he's trying to secure additional funding from a Japanese concern. Unaware to this point that Morty was courting the Japanese, Chris replies, "I'll do what I can. When are the Japanese coming over?" Morty says, "They're not. I'm going to Kobe next week." Chris furrows his brow. It was only a couple days earlier that Morty claimed his doctor grounded him. "I thought you weren't allowed to fly," notes Chris. Morty hesitates, then explains, "I can't suspend all business on account of some veins. Right?" Chris concurs, but he's a bit thrown off by the sudden involvement of another foreign investor.

The next day, the big meeting is underway. Chris stands at a long conference table before two dozen Middle East investors, each dressed in a

remarkably clean white dishdashah and a checkered shumagg. Regretfully, Chris wears an ill-fitting dark wool suit, more appropriate for a brisk winter day in the Northeast. A projector on the table displays some graphs and charts on a screen. Sheik El-Khoury sits at the head of the table. Chris has just completed the first part of his presentation which serves to reassure the investors that their money has been judiciously and productively spent. El-Khoury expresses appreciation for Morque Technologies' fiscal stewardship of the investment, but he's more interested in the progress on the Pentachoron. Chris acknowledges the investors' demand for details. He announces confidently, "Allow me to play a video of our very first successful bench test of the Pentachoron." He presses a key on his laptop which initiates a playback of the test that Morty video-taped in the Lab. The Investors in the room lean forward in their chairs. After witnessing the captured footage and listening to Chris's rundown on coming experiments, he opens the floor for questions.

Q: Is it possible to pick the exact time in the past to probe? A: Not yet

Q: The Pentachoron allows one to peer into a different time. What about location? A: It's designed to look back into time in the precise place that the device sits.

Q: When will you be able to look into the future?

Although Chris expects this question, he stumbles nevertheless. “In the coming weeks, er, I mean years, we hope to glimpse the future. I meant to say years, not weeks.”

El-Khoury wraps up the meeting and invites Chris into his personal study to talk some more. The Sheik reminisces about his time as a student in Southern California, and expresses admiration for Chris’s own academic accomplishments. He asks Chris for his impressions of Abu Dhabi, and when he finds out Chris is staying in a crappy industrial area far from the city center, he insists that Chris stay in a guest house on the property. Unfamiliar with the local customs, and afraid to answer the wrong way, Chris takes a chance and accepts, to the delight of the Sheik. Later that evening, two gorgeous women show up at the guest house to entertain Chris – compliments of El-Khoury.

While Chris is having some serious fun in bed with the two women, Morty makes a trip to the lab to play around with the Pentachoron some more. He types a code into the security lock on the door and enters, but as the lab door swings back a twig falls onto the threshold, preventing it from relocking. Morty powers up the device and inserts the probe. This time on the TV monitor he’s shocked to see a young, totally naked Arielle seated on the edge of the lab table. And his consternation redoubles when he sees Chris walk in from off camera with his underwear around his ankles and get between Arielle’s legs. Morty

yanks the probe out of the Pentachoron. The TV monitor goes back to displaying noise. Distraught, Morty paces the lab floor, shaking his head. Finally, he makes phone call. Arielle answers, "When are you coming home?" Morty replies, "Pretty soon. Y'know, I'm thinking about moving Chris off the project after all." Heartened by Morty's change of mind, Arielle sits up and mutes the TV she's been watching. "How come?" Morty answers rather flatly, "I think he's been screwing me . . . I know he's been screwing you."

Arielle makes no attempt to deny it – she assumes Chris told Morty, perhaps to stir up a confrontation that results in Arielle becoming available once again. She explains that the affair with Chris was over a long time ago, and she begs for forgiveness. Morty isn't too quick to accept any apologies; he's convinced Chris and Arielle are still involved. "I bet you were screwing him even after we got engaged." Arielle pleads, but Morty is just too amped up. "Did you fuck him when I was in Seattle?" Arielle hesitates, then denies it authoritatively, "Absolutely not."

Morty challenges her, "How can I believe you,"

"You have to. I beg you. We're going to have a great life together, Morty. I know it." Morty wants to believe her, but he's shaken. "I wish I shared your confidence, but how can I? I can't predict the . . ." And just before he's about to utter the word "future" Morty looks at the Pentachoron – and stops in his tracks.

Perhaps this oracular device can offer guidance. Morty tells Arielle to stay put as he has more work to do; he'll come home to continue the conversation in person later on.

Morty scoots over to the laptop which is connected to the Pentachoron and begins typing frantically until he comes across a folder which contains a list of Pentachoron functions, one of which is titled "Future Access (UNTESTED ALPHA CODE)". This discovery confirms his suspicions that Chris has been secretly working on a method to use the Pentachoron to peer into the future. Morty clicks on the entry to load the code that will allow him to look into the future and perhaps learn whether or not his relationship with Arielle is doomed. As the code load proceeds, Morty grabs a magazine and heads to the bathroom. Moments later, Declan sneaks into the lab after having passed unobstructed through the open and unsecured front door. Shiny and well-lit, sitting regally atop the lab table, the Pentachoron captures Declan's attention – it's a cynosure for sure. The young punk lifts a corner of the Pentachoron finding it remarkably light. But just as he's about to steal the prize, he freezes up at the sound of a toilet flushing. Morty comes out of the bathroom and locks eyes with Declan. Morty barks, "Who the fuck are you? How did you get in here?" Declan backs up a step. Morty starts toward Declan who quickly bolts for the exit. Morty cuts him off, forcing the boy to retreat to a corner. As Morty closes in, Declan shatters

the glass window of a fire station with a swift kick. Just as Morty gets within a few feet, Declan removes a fire-axe, hauls off and smashes Morty in the head with the butt end, killing him. Declan drops the fire-axe and holds his head in panic. His eyes dart around the lab while a million thoughts rush through his head. Declan grabs Morty's ankles and drags his dead body toward the bathroom. Passing the Pentachoron, Declan stops and studies the shiny device pensively. Suddenly, an idea! Declan hoists Morty's corpse onto the lab table and proceeds to feed it into the Pentachoron. The device accepts the portly body with a soothing hum. After Morty is completely gone, Declan runs back to fetch the fire-axe which he also passes through the device. With all evidence gone, Declan disconnects the laptop and stashes it in his backpack. He lifts the Pentachoron off the table and hustles out the lab.

Back in Abu Dhabi, Chris enjoys the hospitality of Sheik El-Khoury, including a swank room at the Hilton – a quantum step up from his previous accommodations. He calls Morty to update him on the big investor meeting but is sent to voicemail. Chris tries again without success which concerns him – Morty would certainly be waiting impatiently for status. Chris connects to the internet and sees that Morty is not logged onto his chat program. His absence further concerns Chris; he knows Morty would be waiting with bated breath for an update. Chris scans email, one of which draws his attention – an entry with

the subject “Kobe.” As in Japan. Chris’s active imagination runs wild. Is Morty planning to spirit off overseas with the Pentachoron intending to sell it to a deep-pocketed buyer? The trip to Japan coming so soon after Morty’s purported hiatus from flying has already heightened Chris’s anxiety. Now that Chris is on the other side of the world, he feels vulnerable. Morty has a huge head-start. Chris hastily packs his bags and heads for the airport en route to SFO, maxing out two credit cards so he can fly in First Class rather than suffer the confines of in the rear of steerage.

Arielle comes home with wine and gifts hoping to repair her relationship with her cuckolded husband, but she’s disappointed to find Morty absent. Arielle assumes he took off for Japan until she spots his partially-packed luggage on the bed and his airline ticket and passport on the dresser. Now she’s starting to fear he’s gone missing. Her phone rings – it’s Chris, who’s just landed at SFO, sounding agitated. “Arielle? Do you know where Morty is?” Arielle replies, “No, and I’m worried. I’ve been trying to get hold of him for two days. I haven’t seen him since he went to the lab.” Chris reacts when Arielle mentions Morty’s presence in the lab; that fuels his nightmare that Morty took off with the valuable device. Chris reveals his conspiracy theory to Arielle. “This might sound paranoid, but I’m worried that Morty is going to sell the device to a foreign government or terrorists, even.” Arielle is unsure what to think. She informs

Chris that Morty knows about their past affair which blows Chris away. "Jesus, you told him? What the hell for?" Arielle denies it. "I didn't tell him. You must have." They go back and forth, with Arielle finally stating the obvious, "Well, he knows somehow." Chris is shaken at the news. Even though the affair happened years earlier, Chris has longed to restart it and figures Morty sensed his desire. Now Morty is out for revenge. Chris lays it out for Arielle, "It's starting to make sense now. Think about it. Morty wants to cash in on the device now that it works, and he's cutting us both out of it. He's pissed at us for the affair. And he's a major miser when it comes to money - believe me, I've known him longer than you have." Arielle starts to have some doubts now. Chris tells Arielle to meet him at the lab.

A brief time later Chris rushes into the lab desperately calling out Morty's name, stopping in his tracks when he spots the empty stand upon which the Pentachoron once sat. "No. Please, god, no," stammers Chris. Arielle steps into the lab. "God, no, what?" Chris says flatly, "The Pentachoron. It's gone." He unlocks a large steel cabinet and upon finding it empty slams the door shut. Chris goes apoplectic, throwing and kicking things. "That fucking cocksucker! I swear I'll cut his balls off when I find him!" Eventually, tapped out from his rant, Chris sits on the steel stool and cradles his head. Arielle rubs his back.

Act III

Later, in their favorite diner, Chris and Arielle talk through their predicament over a sullen lunch. Chris outlines the scenario: how Morty constantly predicted the device would be worth millions someday, and then just after Chris gets it to work Morty sends him half-way around the world to a bogus meeting. Arielle is still stunned. Chris goes on, "Look, Arielle, you have to get your head around this. Forget what you think you know about wonderful Morty. We have to come up with something fast before it's too late. I need your help. And vice versa." He suggests a two pronged approach: Chris will hire a private investigator to dig into Morty's whereabouts, and Arielle will go to the bank to see if Morty left any financial clues. Arielle nods, but her mind is elsewhere. "Chris, why did you tell Morty about us?" Chris replies, "I swear I didn't. Maybe he sensed it was a possibility. Maybe he floated the concept and you subconsciously confirmed it." Arielle shrugs, suggesting she can't rule out the possibility. Chris confesses that his abrasive behavior toward Arielle since the end of the affair was all a calculated act to prove to Morty that he harbored no romantic desires for Morty's wife. He adds pleadingly, "I hope you can forgive me. I guess you can't camouflage true feelings." Arielle asks with a hint of hopeful inquisitiveness, "And what are those true feelings?"

Oh my – the opening for which Chris has been waiting for years.

Back home in his kitchen, Chris is engaged in a frustrating search for a suitable (i.e. affordable) PI to take his case as Lori questions the point of the entire exercise. She expresses doubt that Morty – a friend and colleague for years – would abruptly steal the device and disappear, leaving his wife and business behind. Lori’s challenge to Chris’s hypothesis, as well as to his PI search, irritates him to no end. He points out angrily, “Morty was just waiting for me to get the fucking thing to work so he could take it for himself. He’s already in Japan, I know it. Bastard tells me he’s not allowed to fly. Doctor’s orders. What a fucking liar!” Lori takes umbrage at Chris’s use of profanity within earshot of their son Albert. Her lopsided sense of priorities infuriates Chris more. He recognizes that Lori doesn’t get it; his life is breaking apart and all she cares about is some profanity. Now Arielle? She gets it. The contrast between his wife and his former lover comes into fuller relief.

Meanwhile, Declan drags a rusty oven away from the wall in the kitchen of his run-down house. The dragging sound disturbs Declan’s father who is asleep in an adjacent room. After a moment in which Declan freezes completely still, ready to push the oven back into place, his father resumes snoring. Declan quietly pulls the oven another couple feet from the wall, and retrieves a bundle wrapped in a blanket from behind a door. He unwraps the bundle to reveal the purloined Pentachoron which he plugs into the electrical outlet behind the oven.

Lights on the device illuminate. He opens the laptop and connects it to the Pentachoron. The laptop requests a password, and after Declan makes a few lame attempts to guess it, incorrectly, the laptop shuts down. In frustration, Declan tries to put an object into the Pentachoron like he had done with Morty's corpse, but the device rejects it, emitting that horrific screech sound. Declan's father wakens again. "What the fuck is that noise, goddammit?" Declan hastily pushes the oven back against the wall, wraps up the Pentachoron and bolts out of the house with it.

Chris sits across a big desk from a Private Investigator. Seeking to appear respectable Chris wears the same dark wool suit he had on in Abu Dhabi - his only suit, apparently. He's just finished explaining the nefarious plot concocted by Morty. The PI probes cursorily about the value of the Pentachoron, but he quickly gets to the subject of his retainer. He quotes a figure that exceeds Chris's upper-bound estimate. Sheepishly, Chris makes a retreat under the guise of consulting with his "financial adviser" – in fact, a nonexistent entity. Chris walks to the nearest ATM machine to discover the account balance is \$3.05. Dejected, he shuffles to his car.

Meanwhile, as Chris has suggested Arielle visits her bank to fish around for any suspicious activity perpetrated by Morty. When she inquires about Morty's account, the bank VP asks, "Which one?" Gulp. "There's more than

one?" The bank VP, not unfamiliar with the "husband's secret account" situation tries to dance around, but Arielle is insistent on knowing the contents of this undisclosed asset. He recites standard bank bullshit about privacy laws, but Arielle is insistent. After desperate pleading from Arielle, the VP reveals that the account is in the Cayman Islands. The account balance? Another secret which the VP is legally bound to protect. Arielle asks the VP to scratch his nose if the account holds more than \$1 million. Like a wary shoplifter about to pocket an Aerosmith CD, he looks around the spacious bank lobby, scratches his nose, then replies, "Is there something else I can help you with, Mrs. Klein?"

At the abandoned gas station, Albert, Declan and a couple of young teenager friends hang out on their bicycles. Declan drags a joint and hands it Albert who demurs. He catches much shit for declining the offer. Declan busts balls until Albert takes a puff. After passing the joint along to the next kid, a concerned Albert asks Declan if he perhaps "borrowed" his father's invention, to which Declan responds indignantly (and forcefully to establish his perception of innocence), "What the hell're you talking about? What would I want that fucking thing for? It doesn't work." The fact that Declan seems to know that the Pentachoron doesn't work suggests he has had contact with it. But before Albert can press his inquisition Declan turns on him hard, and with the approval of the two other teenagers, threatens Albert and chases him from the gas station.

Chris sits on a sofa facing his in-laws in their house. He has just explained the Morty situation, culminating in a request for financial help. The conversation is touchy as Chris's father-in-law Bernie is skeptical as usual. When Chris reveals the need for the loan – to hire a PI – Bernie presses him to call the Attorney General instead. Chris lays out his concerns: "Morty has connections all over the world. He could sell the device and go into hiding for the rest of his life. I need to hire a private investigator. Someone who's an expert in solving this kind of crime." Bernie consults privately with his wife then offers Chris what appears to be a check, but on closer inspection is a slip of paper with the number of a contact in the AG's office. Dejected, Chris shuffles to his car and as he's about to get in, Arielle calls him. She's just come home from her disturbing encounter with the bank VP. She tearfully retells the story of Morty's hidden account. Chris wants to comfort her; Arielle accepts.

At Morty's house Chris learns the specifics of the secret account, i.e. \$1 million in deposits. The revelation that Morty had hoarded such a sum drives Chris nuts, and serves to forge a mutual mission for Chris and Arielle. "We have to stop that bastard, no matter what, Arielle. It ain't right what he's done to us." Arielle inquires about Chris's progress with the private investigator, but he's too ashamed to admit financial shortcomings. Instead, Chris suggests that Arielle go to the police after all; he'll pursue some intelligence gathering on his own in the

meantime. With the game plan settled, Arielle tells Chris, "I really admire you. You're the smartest person I've ever met. Honest. I know it was you who made the Pentachoron a reality." Sensing some love, Chris informs Arielle that his relationship with his wife Lori is on the rocks; he's ready now to give his true love to Arielle. He tells her, "In a strange way, now that the Pentachoron's gone I can see again. Not that I won't fight to get it back, but whatever happens, we have to be together, Arielle." Arielle looks deeply into Chris's eyes and they embrace. Just like the encounter in the Sequoia forest years before.

The following morning Chris is with Arielle on her doorstep; he's dressed and ready to leave Arielle's place. She wears a robe. It's clear they've spent the night together, and thoroughly enjoyed it. Chris again expresses confidence that together they will bring down Morty and recover the Pentachoron. Arielle tells Chris that she'll meet with the police later in the day. The two embrace and kiss. Arielle's phone rings inside the house and she makes a move to answer it but Chris tightens his embrace. Arielle misses a call from the security firm that manages the Morque Technologies lab building. They leave a message indicating they have automatically changed the numeric passcode for the lock on the lab door, as called for in their contract. The caller concludes, "We've e-mailed you the new code. Thanks for your business."

Back home, Chris hunches over his laptop, the glow of the screen illuminating his dour face. Albert enters the room and inquires as to what his father is up to. Chris remarks that he's evaluating options for hiring a PI – he's too embarrassed to admit he can't afford it. Albert encourages his father to undertake the investigation himself. "You're way smarter than any private investigator," he says. Chris is flattered that his son thinks of him as a superhero, but he demurs. Albert presses on, suggesting that Morty could be in the lab at this very moment. After all, don't criminals always return to the scene of the crime? Chris initially rejects the notion, but then he remembers that the missing laptop contained back-level software. Perhaps Morty might indeed return to the lab to download the latest code before disappearing. A long-shot for sure, but worth a shot. Chris decides to follow his son's advice which makes Albert proud. Albert says hopefully, "I know you're going to get the Pentachoron back. You'll find it, you'll see."

At the same time, at a spot by the creek near Declan's house, the young thief tosses the Pentachoron into the water. For a moment it floats on the surface, sparking and crackling. As he watches the Pentachoron flounder Declan wipes some dirt off a can of beer, pops it open and takes a drink. Seconds later the Pentachoron fizzles out unceremoniously and sinks beneath the murky surface. A multi-million dollar device reduced to box of short circuits.

Arielle makes a visit to the police station where she encounters Officer Niedzielski, a low level cop, as well as a heaping helping of bureaucracy. After sensing the blow-off she demands to speak to a superior officer. While Arielle waits impatiently to speak to Lt. Grove, Chris speeds into the parking lot of Morque Technologies. He tries to enter the lab but his expired passcode is rejected. Frustrated, he marches around to the back of the building.

Lt. Grove, familiar with missing persons cases that inevitably turn out to be nothing more than a wayward spouse on a bender, tries to persuade Arielle to wait another day or two, but she'll have none of it. Arielle is adamant that Morty is on the lam and the longer she waits the harder it will be to find him. "I think he left the country with the intention of selling it. And cutting his partners out of the profits, including me." Resigned to the fact that Arielle won't go away, Lt. Grove starts the paperwork.

Back at the lab, Chris smashes a cellar window and slides through the narrow opening. He is unaware that the security box by the front entrance is flashing red as a result of his forced entry. Chris climbs the stairs to the main floor of the lab and calls out, "Morty, are you in here? Let's work this out, man. No need to rip each other off." But Morty isn't there. As Chris walks toward the center of the lab he steps in broken pieces of glass beneath the fire station. "What the fuck?" Chris proceeds to Morty's desk where he rummages through a bunch

of papers discovering a tiny scrap with some random characters written on it. Intrigued by the find Chris flips open a laptop and types in Morty's userid and what he hopes is his password. Sure enough, it works. Chris pores through Morty's email account and comes upon a note Morty sent to his lawyer. It reads: "When I get back from Japan I want to talk to you about granting Chris Hahn more shares. The last thing I want now is for the Japanese investment to dilute his holdings and give him a reason to leave." The prospect that Morty is considering a stock award seems incongruous to Chris. Why would Morty be arranging a retention bonus when he was planning to steal the Pentachoron? Unless...?

Arielle answers some basic questions for Lt. Grove and provides a few recent photos of Morty. Grove asks who else may have had access to the valuable device. Arielle replies, "Chris Hahn, but I don't think —." Before she can register her doubts that Chris is a culprit, Grove plants the notion. "Do you have any reason to suspect Mr. Hahn? Is he capable of incapacitating Mr. Klein and stealing the invention for personal gain?" The question knocks Arielle off balance, but before she can respond, Officer Niedzielski barges in to announce that a security company has reported a break-in at Morque Technologies.

Chris sits at Morty's desk staring at the laptop. The sound of tires screeching in the parking lot interrupts his confused and painful solitude. Chris

looks out the window and sees some police cars rolling into the lot. Knowing his unorthodox entry into the lab had triggered an alarm, he starts back toward the desk unconcerned. He'll simply explain the balky lock and reaffirm his authorization to be in the building. Suddenly a loud mechanical hum stops him in his tracks. Out of thin air a bloody fire-axe falls to the floor. Chris walks over to the fire-axe, picks it up and looks it over, confused. Some bloody hairs are embedded where the handle and the head meet. Another loud hum again startles Chris. The contused head of Morty Klein appears to float in mid-air, followed by the appearance of his neck, torso, legs and feet until his entire limp body crumples to the floor. In total shock, Chris, still holding the fire-axe, bends down to inspect the bizarre arrival of his dead business partner.

Outside, an employee of the security firm, accompanied by several cops punches numbers into the keypad by the door, then nods to indicate it's now unlocked. The cops storm in, guns drawn. Catatonic, Chris stares stupidly at the cops, one of whom demands, "Drop the fucking axe right fucking now!" Two cops, guns trained on Chris, rush Swat-like behind him, and the moment Chris belated drops the fire-axe, one of the cops grabs his arms and forces him to the ground. He presses a knee into Chris's back and handcuffs him roughly. As this goes on a third cop attends to Morty, announcing blandly that he's dead. Chris is hoisted to his feet by the handcuffs and marched toward the exit. The cop

begins to recite the familiar Miranda rights, but Chris interrupts him. "It's not what you think. Someone else killed Morty and sent his body into the future." The cop replies, "Listen to me carefully, Mr. Scientist. Anything you say can and will be used against you."

Arielle speeds into the parking lot just as the cop escorts Chris out of the Lab. Arielle calls out to him. Agitated, Chris blurts, "Arielle! Please believe me - I didn't kill Morty! It was the Pentachoron!" An Ambulance arrives and two paramedics rush a gurney toward the Lab entrance. The cop shoves Chris into the backseat of a police cruiser. Arielle approaches the cruiser but the cop blocks her. She pleads for information. The cop asks, "Do you know the deceased, Ma'am?" Arielle mumbles, "Deceased?" Her face then crumples into a mass of tears.

Chris is arraigned before a judge and pleads not guilty. Meanwhile, Sheik El-Khoury who is about to board a plane to the U.S. receives the shocking news of Morty's murder.

At Declan's house, his inebriated father stumbles into the kid's room and slaps his sleeping son across the back of his head, waking him. He shows his son a partially depleted six-pack of beer. "Goddamn you, boy! Stealing my beers again, huh?" Declan cowers as the old man looks around the bedroom. He spots

the corner of the stolen laptop protruding from Declan's backpack. He grabs the laptop and storms out of Declan's room.

At a computer repair store, Declan's father receives a payment of \$20 for the laptop. After the man leaves with the cash, a computer technician at the store fiddles with the laptop, successfully reanimating it. He scans a lengthy list of files and programs coming across some very complicated programming code. The technician has never seen such baffling stuff. He calls a scientist he knows at a national lab and explains what he found. The scientist rushes over to the repair shop and after perusing the contents of the laptop, purchases it for \$1,000 – no questions asked.

Chris is on trial. A witness testifies that blood and hair found on the fire-axe match that of the dead Morty, and the fingerprints on the handle match Chris's. The prosecutor dramatically displays the fire-axe to the jury. Later, Chris is found guilty and escorted out of the courtroom. Lori breaks down in tears as her father Bernie storms out, disgusted.

On a rainy day a sheriff's deputy padlocks a chain across the entrance to the Morque Technologies building. He posts a sign that reads "Sheriff's Sale October 10."

Inside a small lab in the late evening, the scientist who purchased the laptop sits at a desk while a younger engineer fusses with a device that resembles

a partially-constructed Pentachoron. The engineer remarks in frustration, "We'll never get this frickin' thing to work. It's too damn complicated." The scientist responds, "We have to. It'll be worth millions." The engineer struggles to turn a reluctant bolt with a wrench, breaking off the head.

It's ten years later and Chris lies on a bunk in his prison cell reading a book. He looks much older, with thinner hair and a bulkier gut. A prison guard informs Chris that he has a visitor. The guard escorts Chris past a cell that holds a grown-up Declan.

Chris's surprise visitor is the engineer who had struggled with the scientist to re-create the Pentachoron. After some perfunctory conversation in which Chris again claims his innocence, the engineer explains that the Pentachoron is back and operational. Chris is stupefied. After a moment to let the concept sink in, Chris asks the engineer to write down instructions on a piece of paper.

Epilog

The story jumps back to the beginning, in the hallway outside the auditorium where Morty tells Chris that he's going to start up a new company. As before, Chris agrees to join Morque Technologies to Morty's exuberant joy. Just before the two men re-enter the auditorium, they hear a hum. Suddenly a letter floats out of nowhere, falling on the floor at Chris's feet. He and Morty look at each other in confusion. Finally, Chris picks up the letter and reads it. It is a missive to him from his future self. The letter reads:

To Chris Hahn of 1997. I implore you with all my heart - do not join Morty Klein in his business venture. If you do, you'll lose everything and end up in prison for murder. Go back into the meeting right now. Although he'll never know it, Morty will appreciate your decision too, believe me. If things get too boring for you, look up a swell girl named Arielle Cowan. You can search for her next year after a company called Google starts up. And for God's sake, buy as much Google stock as you can possibly afford. Sincerely, Chris Hahn of 2019.

Chris is stunned. Morty asks what's in the letter, but Chris is silent. He walks quietly back into the auditorium, leaving Morty baffled behind the closing door.

THE END