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10:07:24  
by  
Terry Bisson

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Hello?

It's me.

What is it this time?

I have this great idea for a story.

Not another science fiction story. Do you have any idea what time it is?

Sure, it's 10:07:24. But you're going to love this one.

Please. I don't have time for it.

This is a story about Time, as a matter of fact.

I can't use another time travel story.

This is different! In this story, it's Time itself that travels.

So what? Time always travels. It stops. It goes.

In this story Time does nothing but travel. It can't stop. It can't not travel.

I said no science fiction.

No way! This is speculative fiction, based on the cutting edge ideas of the new physics. This is real Rudy Rucker stuff! Imagine a universe where time never stops. It just rolls on, hour by hour, minute by minute, second by second. Mini-second by mini-second.

I don't get it. What do you mean, time never stops? There's no Present? No Now?

Exactly! By the time you say the word "now," that Now is gone, and there's another Now. Then another and another.

Time only stops for like a second at a time? Is that the idea?

Time doesn't stop at all! Not for a second. Not for a mini-micro-nano-second. It keeps flowing along, like a river. Like an ever-rolling stream. Like a bowling ball!

That's ridiculous. There has to be a Now where Time is stopped. Like right now--10:07:24. Otherwise how could anything exist?

In this universe we're talking about, everything exists in the Now, but it's a moving Now.

Isn't that a contradiction in terms--a moving Now?

In our universe, in the real universe, yes. But in this speculative universe, it's the other way around. Look at it this way. When we visualize Time, it's like a series of lakes, right? They're all at ...

I'm not stupid. I know what Time is like.

Sorry. But now visualize a universe in which somebody has blown the main dam, so to speak. Time is a stream: moving, flowing like a river, continually in motion--

Ridiculous. Not only intelligence but matter itself would be unthinkable under such conditions.

But what if the moving Now seemed perfectly normal to the denizens of this universe? Imagine it! Riding the foaming crest of Time like surfers on a wave. Poised between past and future on an ever-changing, never-ending Now ...

Stop! Who'd want to read stuff like that? Makes you dizzy just to think about it.

Exactly! It's dizzying, disturbing, exhilarating, thought-provoking. That's the whole idea! It will start a whole new literary trend. We can call it chronopunk, a mind-blowing new meta-fiction from the cutting edge of quantum physics where ...

You're wasting your time. I can't imagine it. I won't bother to. A world in which Time never stops? Never even pauses! That's worse than science fiction; it's fantasy.

But that's where you're wrong. Are you ready for the best part? I didn't make this up! It's all based on science fact. At least theory. I read about it in Omni.\*

Omni. No wonder.

Seriously! Scientists are speculating about alternate universes where Time might flow in a constant stream. Where there's never a fixed chronological point, not even for a micro-second. It's never been demonstrated, of course, but it's possible, according to the laws of relativity and quantum mechanics. It's even probable.

Like light matter?

Exactly. Or suns. That's the beauty of science fiction. We can take the far-out ideas of theoretical physics and make them seem real by putting them in a story.

I thought you said this wasn't science fiction.

I was using the term loosely. I meant speculative.

And there hasn't been even a hint of a story.

I was just getting to the story. You have these people--a woman and a man,

say, so you've got a love interest. She's a scientist. She looks at her watch and suddenly...

Why is the woman always the scientist?

He's the scientist, then. Whatever. Looks at his watch. What time is it? she asks. Well, he can't tell her! Time keeps changing! He waits for it to stop but it doesn't. There's no Now! Now is continually turning into then--

I thought you said it was normal for them.

Okay, what if it wasn't. What if they were just noticing. You have to have a story. It could be funny! He looks at his watch and says, "The time is ... is ... is ..." She says, "Well?" He says, "Is ... is ... is... " It could be hilarious.

A guy looking at his watch and stuttering is not all that hilarious.

It could be an adventure, then. They try to do something about it. That's it, of course! They're both scientists, faced with the ultimate disaster. Runaway Time! Maybe they try to stop Time. With an atomic clock. Or something.

I hate to interrupt but it is 10:07:24.

Imagine the suspense! What if Time runs out before they can stop it? What if ...

I hate to interrupt but we've wasted enough time on this.

You said yourself it's still 10:07:24.

Yeah, but it'll be another time before you know it. And I'm going to have to pass on this story idea. Our readers want stories they can identify with, not wild speculations on theoretical physics set in bizarre alternate universes, no matter how thought-provoking. Try a math magazine or something. One question, though. While it's still 10:07:24.

What?

What's a rucky rooter?

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#### About The Author

Terry Bisson is the author of five novels including PIRATES OF THE UNIVERSE (Tor, 1996), the most-reviewed SF novel of 1996. His short story "Bears Discover Fire" swept almost every honor in the SF field in 1990-91, including both the Nebula and Hugo awards. He recently completed the long-awaited sequel to A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ for the estate of Walter M. Miller, Jr., which will be published by Bantam as SAINT LEIBOWITZ AND THER WILD HORSE WOMAN in October 1997.

For more information about Terry Bisson and his work, visit him on the Web at: <http://www.sff.net/people/tbisson>

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