

TERRY BISSON

INCIDENT AT OAK RIDGE

As Hollywood budgets multiply past NASA's, the notion Terry Bisson posited in *Voyage to the Red Planet*--that the first people to make the journey from Earth to Mars will be Hollywood actors--seems more plausible all the time. But this new story doesn't actually concern itself with thespians, except in the sense that all the world's a stage. The players in this story certainly have their exits and entrances, and as Shakespeare said, one man in his time plays many parts. But what of two men out of [their time] What parts do they play in the past..., or in the future?

PART ONE

EXT -- A MOUNTAIN TRAIL IN AN APPALACHIAN HOLLOW. EVENING.

TWO YOUNG MEN ARE HIKING. FRED is dark, tall, about thirty. KIM is Asian, stockier; same age. Both have short hair. They are junior college profs -- Fred in physics, Kim in English.

It is fall, and still warm. They carry light day packs. Both wear Polartec sweats, light Gore-tex jackets, Nike boots -- modern gear.

It is getting dark. They are in a hurry. Kim is peeling off his jacket. Fred is punching numbers into a cellular phone.

FRED

Ann's gonna kill me. I promised her we would be back in Knoxville by five. Wish I could get this phone to work!

KIM

How did it get so warm? Wish I had a cigarette.

FRED

I know we're not out of range. I checked my messages right after we had lunch. (looks up) A cigarette? Kim!!!

KIM

What would you say if I told you there was a pack of Marlboros in the glove compartment of my Cherokee?

FRED

What would you say if I told you I found them this morning while you were paying for the gas and threw them out?

EXT. THE MOUNTAINS. A LOW TANGLE OF GORGES, A FEATURELESS MAZE.

Voices continue as before.

KIM (o.s.)

I would say you were a cold-hearted bastard.

FRED (o.s.)

And I would say friends don't let friends smoke. You quit, remember?

KIM (o.s.)

Yeah, yeah. Damn! Every one of these hollows looks exactly the same. Are we still on the right trail?

FRED (o.s.)

Got me. What happened to the blazes?

EXT. ON THE TRAIL, AS BEFORE.

Kim is studying his Casio wristwatch; Fred, his cellular phone.

KIM

Maybe the storm washed them away. Like the display on my watch. I'm getting a blank!

FRED

Maybe that lightning zapped our eproms. I'm not even getting a dial tone.

The SOUND of an ENGINE, more like a truck in low gear than a car.

A FLASH of headlights up the hillside, through the trees.

KIM

Fred, look! A car!

CUT TO:

EXT. A STEEP DIRT ROAD.

Two soldiers in World War II uniforms, in an open Jeep. The SERGEANT holds an

M-1 carbine between his knees; he has a Southern hillbilly accent. The CORPORAL (from Brooklyn) is driving.

SERGEANT

I thought you said you knew this road, Corporal.

CORPORAL

I do, Sarge. We're still inside Perimeter Two. I must have missed the first turn in that storm.

SERGEANT

That was the most hellacious lightning I've ever saw. Hey! Stop.

The sergeant stands up in the front seat of the Jeep, M-1 carbine at the ready.

WIDER VIEW:

Kim and Fred run out of the woods onto the road, waving.

SERGEANT

Halt or I'll shoot!

KIM

Relax, man. Are you guys --?

SERGEANT

Halt! You are in a restricted area. Turn around and put your hands on the back of your head.

FRED

(offended)

You fellows are way out of line here! This is a public recreational --

The sergeant FIRES the carbine over their heads.

Everybody and everything stops. All that can be heard is the idling of the Jeep.

SERGEANT

Shut up! Turn around. NOW! Down on your knees!

Fred and Kim get down on their knees.

SERGEANT

Hands on the back of your head!

Fred and Kim put their hands on the backs of their heads.

KIM

(whisper)

What is this, fucking Deliverance?

FRED

This is no joke. These guys are nuts. Some kind of militia creeps.

SERGEANT

Shut up! Corporal, get their weapons. The Jap first.

The corporal pulls on the emergency brake with a LOUD RATCHETING SOUND. Gets out of the Jeep.

KIM

Jap? I'm not Japanese.

FRED

And we're not hunters, we're hikers. We're not carrying any weapons! We're from Knoxville. We both teach at Cumberland Community College.

SERGEANT

Shut up, both of you!

The corporal frisks them both. Finds Fred's cell phone.

CORPORAL

Sarge, look at this! Some kind of radio.

FRED

It's a cellular phone.

SERGEANT

You ain't selling me nothing. Now shut up!

KIM

(under his breath)

You ignorant fucking hillbilly!

The corporal drags the two packs over and puts them in the Jeep. Hands the phone to the sergeant.

CORPORAL

Lots of nylon and plastic stuff. The shoes look sorta German.

KIM

German? Are you guys playing Army or something?!

FRED

Our billfolds are in the car. We're hikers with a perfect right to...

SERGEANT

Shut up! Put them in the Jeep.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUARDPOST. ENTRANCE TO MILITARY COMPOUND.

The Jeep pulls up. Fred and Kim are sitting in the back with their hands on their heads. The sergeant holds the M-1 on them. An MP looks at the two captives admiringly.

MP

Wow. Where'd you find these two?

SERGEANT

Inside P Two, outside P One. Careful, they speak English. The Jap too.

FRED

Of course we speak English!

KIM

What's this Jap shit? I'm Korean, and I'm as fucking American as --

SERGEANT

(jostles him roughly)

Shut up! Where should I take them?

GUARD

That new schoolhouse in D is empty. I'll call security. Or should I call intelligence?

SERGEANT

Better call both. Do you have any handcuffs?

GUARD

Just one pair.

CUT TO:

EXT. JEEP ON A MUDDY STREET.

Lights of a suburb under construction. Lumber, equipment all around, a few military guards.

Fred and Kim in the back of the Jeep are now handcuffed together, Fred's right hand to Kim's left.

KIM

This is crazy. Do you have any idea where we are.

FRED

Afraid so. Look around.

KIM

Oak Ridge? But Oak Ridge was shut down, wasn't it?

FRED

So they tell us.

KIM

What do you mean?

FRED

I don't know what I mean, Kim. But I do know this is no backwoods redneck militia.

SERGEANT

Shut up!

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLROOM.

Desks [or little kids, big oak teacher's desk, blackboard. A globe. Calendar on wall says OCTOBER 1944.

Fred and Kim, handcuffed together, are hustled in the door by the sergeant.

FRED

This is outrageous. I demand to speak with your commanding officer.

SERGEANT

Shut up!

The door is SLAMMED. Kim starts pacing. Fred has no choice but to follow awkwardly. Neither notices the calendar.

KIM

Commanding officer? You believe these guys are really the Army? They're play-acting. They don't even look right.

FRED

I don't know what to believe. Maybe it's some kind of maneuvers.

Kim idly spins globe as he passes. Stops, jerking Fred to a sudden halt.

KIM

Hey! There's only one Korea! And look at Russia. Weird.

FRED

What's so weird about an out-of-date globe in a Tennessee schoolroom?

KIM

Except this globe is new. (Looks around) So are these oldfashioned chairs, this

black blackboard --

FRED

Oh shit. Kim. (Points to calendar) Look.

They walk together, in step at last, to the front of the room and look at the calendar. Fred flips through it.

FRED

(shaking head)

This is not possible.

KIM

Neither is Oak Ridge. But you saw it and so did I.

Dragging Fred, Kim crosses to door and knocks on it.

KIM

Hey! Sergeant!

SERGEANT

Shut up!

KIM

Just tell me the date.

SERGEANT

Wednesday. October 11.

FRED

He means -- the year.

SERGEANT

1944. I don't know what you call it in Germany.

Fred and Kim stare at each other. There is a long silence as they sit down, side by side, in the little desks.

KIM

It's not fucking possible.

FRED

You're right. Except that it's happening. It's like quantum physics.

KIM

What do you mean?

FRED

It doesn't make any sense but it explains everything else. The GIs, the M1s ...

KIM

The Jeep. My God...The Jap!

FRED

(nodding)

Oak Ridge. The hiking trails run through the old perimeter of the plant, when it was top secret.

KIM

The Manhattan Project. Jesus! They're making the atomic bomb, and they think we're spies! They think I'm Japanese!

Fred and Kim look at one another in silent terror. Then Kim gets up and knocks on the door again.

KIM

Hey! Sergeant!

SERGEANT

I told you, shut up!

KIM

All I want is a cigarette.

FRED

What are you doing? You quit, remember?

KIM

If I'm going to be shot as a spy, I'm going to have a last cigarette. (To door)
Come on, Sarge, have a heart. If it's 1944, I'll tell you who wins the World Series.

A cigarette slides under the door, followed by a book of matches.

KIM

Thanks! The Cardinals.

SOLDIER

Big deal. Everybody knows the Cards are going to win. Even a damn Jap. Now shut up!

Kim LIGHTS UP while Fred glares at him; since they are handcuffed together it looks almost like Fred is helping.

FADE

PART TWO

INT. THE SCHOOL ROOM, TWENTY MINUTES LATER.

Fred and Kim are sitting at two tiny desks, side by side. The DOOR OPENS and the sergeant comes in, followed by the CAPTAIN, who wears a Colt .45.

CAPTAIN

Sprachen zie deutsch?

FRED

We don't speak German. We're from Knoxville.

CAPTAIN

Kitano ay tora boru.

KIM

Auf Weiderzein, you fucking hillbilly idiots.

The captain SMACKS Kim across the face. In a SUDDEN EXPLOSION OF VIOLENCE, Fred stands up to defend Kim and the sergeant pushes him back down in his seat. It's over almost as soon as it begins.

SERGEANT

Sit down and shut up!

FRED

Colonel, this is all a mistake.

CAPTAIN

It's Captain, and there's no mistake. You were caught redhanded in a class one restricted area. You could be shot for looking at that perimeter, much less crossing it.

KIM

We didn't cross any fucking perimeter! And I'm not --

The sergeant smacks him in the back of the head.

SERGEANT

Shut up, you murdering yellow bastard.

CAPTAIN

I have your radio.

FRED

(nervously; has a plan)

I understand what you're thinking, Captain. But you're wrong. We know what's going on here. We're -- part of the project.

CAPTAIN

You're what?

The captain looks sideways at the sergeant, who remains silent.

KIM

We didn't cross any fucking perimeter. I know it's hard to believe, but we're from your future. We were just --

Fred stops Kim with a kick.

FRED

We're physicists, Captain. From Manhattan, if you know what I mean. We need to speak with Dr. Richard Feynman as soon as possible. It's a security matter.

CAPTAIN

Dr. who?

Kim looks at Fred, puzzled. Fred plunges on.

FRED

Dr. Richard Feynman, Los Alamos.

The captain is getting agitated. The sergeant, like Kim, is looking very confused.

CAPTAIN

Sergeant, wait outside the door.

The sergeant EXITS and closes the door behind him. The captain draws his .45 and cocks it menacingly.

CAPTAIN

Now say that again.

FRED

(gaining confidence)

We are physicists, on a special assignment with the Manhattan Project. Classified. You are to contact Dr. Richard Feynman at Los Alamos. Theoretical Computation Group.

CAPTAIN

(thinking it over)

Physicists. And him?

FRED

Him too. He's Korean, not Japanese.

KIM

(confused but eager to help)

An enemy of the Japanese. Besides, you had Japanese in your own Army. Not all --

Fred kicks him again. Kim shuts up. The captain looks from one to the other,

suspicious.

CAPTAIN

So what were you doing in the woods?

FRED

(cool, haughty; getting into it)

Sorry, Captain. That's all I can say until we report to Dr. Feynman personally. I'm sure you can appreciate the importance of secrecy.

Kim is silent, watching all this in amazement.

CAPTAIN

(skeptical)

I'll make a call.

FRED

Please. (Holds up cuffed right hand) And unlock these.

CAPTAIN

(as he exits)

Not a chance. Sergeant, hold your position until you receive further orders from me personally.

KIM

Captain? One other thing.

CAPTAIN

Yes?

KIM

How about some cigarettes. While we're waiting for Dick.

The captain tosses Kim his half empty pack of Luckies, then slams the door emphatically.

KIM

(lighting up)

Feynman!

FRED

The physicist. Nobel Prize, 1966. Quantum thermodynamics. He worked on the Manhattan Project as a young man. He and Oppenheimer...

KIM

I know who Richard Feynman is, Fred! You're the one who sent me that book, Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman, a couple of years ago. All I remember is he was from Brooklyn and he played the bongo drums. And was a smartass. But what does he have to do with us?

FRED

He was from Queens, actually. And what he has to do with us, is that he's going to save our lives. Maybe.

Kim is listening. Fred is so caught up in his own plan that he doesn't notice Kim is smoking.

FRED

(continues)

Richard Feynman is the one man alive in 1944 who might actually believe our story and be able to help us. He was an original thinker, with an open mind. A true genius. Luckily I have been reading his biography.

KIM

The captain sure as hell sat up for that "theoretical computational" stuff!

FRED

He was reacting to Los Alamos. Most of the soldiers here don't even know Los Alamos exists. Any more than they know what Oak Ridge is for.

Fred notices Kim's cigarette for the first time. Reaches for it.

FRED

(continues)

I can't believe you are smoking! You can't smoke in here! It's a classroom.

KIM

(snatching it back)

Quit being such a stick, Fred! We're stuck in the past before we were even born and you're worried about a cigarette. Besides, what good's Feynman going to do us if he's in New Mexico?

FRED

He was at Oak Ridge a lot. Maybe we'll get lucky. Or maybe they'll fly him here in a DC3. That is, if they believe me enough to call him. And if he's curious enough to want to find out what's going on.

KIM

And if he isn't curious? Or they don't bother to call him? Or we don't get lucky?

Fred solemnly puts his finger to the side of his head.

FRED

This is Oak Ridge, World War II. It doesn't even officially exist. There wouldn't be a trial or anything.

Kim winces. He checks his watch on his right (uncuffed) wrist.

KIM

I wonder if we get a last supper -- Hey, my watch is working! I got the display back.

FRED

What time is it?

KIM

7:22. I wonder if that's our time. The date thing says November 17, 1998.

FRED

That's it! The watch! It proves we're from the future!

Fred reaches for the watch. Kim pulls it away.

KIM

It doesn't prove anything. You can program a watch to say any date.

FRED

Not in 1944 you can't! Not with an LCD display. Don't you get it? The watch is proof we're from the future, if we can get Feynman, or any scientist, or anybody with normal intelligence to look at it.

KIM

You don't think much of these Army guys, do you?

FRED

Hell no. They're itching to shoot us.

The DOOR OPENS. Kim and Fred look up and fall silent, frightened.

The captain enters with RICHARD FEYNMAN, a 30-something young man in 1940s slacks and sport shirt, wearing a windbreaker with an ID tag. He is the same age as Fred and Kim -- a hip contrast to the captain.

Fred stands, pulling Kim awkwardly to his feet.

FRED

Dr. Feynman!

CAPTAIN

You know these men?

FEYNMAN

(with a mischievous grin)

Could be, Captain. Let's hear what they've got to say.

Impulsively, Kim hands his watch to Feynman.

FEYNMAN

(joking; a comic Yiddish accent)

They're salesmen? How much you want for this?

KIM

Push the little button on the side.

Alarmed, the captain grabs for the watch. Feynman pulls it away and checks the display, intrigued.

CAPTAIN

It could be a weapon!

FRED

It's a quartz digital watch. LCD display.

KIM

It's from the future!

FEYNMAN

(amused; holds watch to his ear)

Time Travelers from the future! So I guess you can tell me who wins the world series.

KIM

(points to calendar)

1944: The Cardinals.

FEYNMAN

(slips the watch into his pocket)

A safe guess, right, Captain?

The captain is not amused.

FRED

We can also tell you who wins the war. And about Bethe, and Oppenheimer -- and Arline.

FEYNMAN

(suddenly serious)

Captain, perhaps I should have a word or two with these gentlemen.

The captain takes his .45 out of his holster and hands it to Feynman.

CAPTAIN

I'll be right outside the door.

He leaves, shutting the door behind him. Feynman sits on the teacher's desk facing Fred and Kim. He holds the big .45 carelessly on his lap. He is relaxed.

FEYNMAN

Time travelers, huh? Does that make me a ghost from the past? Or you, ghosts from the future?

FRED

It's no joke. I know it's hard to believe.

FEYNMAN

Try me.

KIM

In the first place, I'm Korean, not Japanese. Not that it ...

FRED

(interrupting Kim)

We are from the future, Dr. Feynman. Your future, that is. From 1998, to be exact. November 17, 1998.

Fred and Kim both look at Feynman, waiting for a response. Feynman only looks politely interested.

FRED

(continuing)

We were hiking. In 1998 this whole area is hiking trails, a wilderness preserve.

FEYNMAN

I love it -- the world is going backwards!

KIM

There was some kind of electrical storm. It never did .rain but there was this weird lightning --

FEYNMAN

(leans forward, curious at last)

Lightning.

FRED

Very close. Sounded like the world was being ripped apart. As soon as it stopped we' started looking for Kim's car.

KIM

Jeep Cherokee. Direct descendant of the WWII military Jeep.

Fred shoots Kim a look that says, "stick to the point."

FRED

And that's when we got picked up by Oak Ridge security. We are at Oak Ridge, right?

After a slight hesitation, Feynman nods. He takes Kim's watch out of his pocket.

FRED

(continuing)

We had somehow been shifted back fifty years, to 1944.

FEYNMAN

(studying the watch)

Fifty-three years, eleven months and six days, exactly. Plus an hour and a half.

KIM

They think we are spies.

FEYNMAN

You have to admit you look suspicious. A Jap and a Jew.

KIM

I told you, I'm Korean.

FEYNMAN

(shrugs)

This is the Army. They don't know from Korean.

FRED

How'd you know I was' Jewish.

FEYNMAN

(Catskill shtik)

Ya know, ya know? Ya look Jewish.

Fred is puzzled. He can't tell if Feynman believes their story or not. The funnyman/scientist hears it all with an ironic smile. Fred decides to push oil.

FRED

We figured you were our only chance. We had to find someone who would believe us.

FEYNMAN

But why me?

FRED

You are famous. That is, you will be. You win a Nobel Prize for your work in quantum thermodynamics in 1966.

FEYNMAN

So I'm the ghost. I'm dead, I suppose.

FRED

Well, of course. Sort of. In our time. But ...

FEYNMAN

The Nobel Prize! I have to wait twenty years -- but that's not so bad. And when do I die?

FRED

I -- I don't think I'm supposed to tell you that.

FEYNMAN

(Catskill shtik again)

So, now we have rules for Time Travel?

FRED

You don't believe me, do you? (angrily) Then how do I know your wife's name, Arline? Or that you call her Putsy? Or she dies next year from TB --

A sudden silence. Kim winces. Feynman looks serious but unperturbed.

FRED

I'm sorry. I didn't...

FEYNMAN

It's okay. We're prepared for Arline's death. (Changing the mood) Tell me, do the Dodgers ever win the Series?

KIM

Hell, yes. 1956. With a black player, too. Jackie Robinson.

FRED

And the Allies win the war.

FEYNMAN

What do we win it with -- that's the question.

KIM

The atomic bomb. Hiroshima.

FEYNMAN

(surprised)

They drop it on Japan? (winces) On a city?

FRED

Two cities. Nagasaki and Hiroshima. You do believe us, then!

FEYNMAN

Why not? It's like quantum physics. It doesn't make any sense but it explains a lot. It explains you guys, for one thing. Your artifacts. (Holds up the watch) The funny shoes.

FRED

(checks his Gore-Tex boots)

Funny shoes?

KIM

Hooray! So we're not going to get shot!

FEYNMAN

Shhhh! Not by the Army anyway. Not if I can help it.

CAPTAIN

(Knocking on door) What's going on in there?

FEYNMAN

It's all right, Captain. (To Fred and Kim) You guys must be starving. Let's order out ...

FADE OUT

PART THREE

INT. SCHOOLROOM. HALF HOUR LATER.

They are finishing their dinners, GI rations. Fred and Kim are still handcuffed together.

FEYNMAN

They call it NASA, huh? But I must be pretty old. Do I get to go into space?

FRED

I probably shouldn't get specific.

FEYNMAN

I understand. This is like talking to God. (Bangs on his catsup) Tell me, God, do they ever solve this problem?

KIM

Surely you are joking, Mr. Feynman.

FEYNMAN

Huh? Oh, I get it, that's the book you were telling me about. Is that how you knew I was at Oak Ridge? It's supposed to be a secret, you know.

FRED

I got that from another book, your biography. Genius, by James Gleick.

FEYNMAN

Great title! It so happens that I arrived here yesterday to investigate what Oak Ridge calls a thermodynamic incident, and Oppy and I call a loop-singularity.

KIM

Oppenheimer? A meltdown?

FEYNMAN

(shaking his head)

Potentially far more serious than that. It appears the forces that bind the nucleus of the atom, also bind the past and future.

FRED

You mean --?

FENYMAN

(nods)

You might say I've been expecting you. Or something like you. The "lightning" you saw was the opening of the loop-singularity, which your presence here in the present, or if you insist, the past, serves to stabilize. Temporarily.

KIM

Conservation of energy?

FEYNMAN

More or less. But you're the English professor, right? Let's just call it a dependent parenthetical clause. Feynman pulls a pack of Luckies from his jacket and lights two cigarettes. Hands one to Kim.

FRED

Those things will kill you.

FEYNMAN

(with a devil-may-care grin)

Yeah, but according to you guys I'm already dead.

KIM

And I'm not even born! So lighten up, Fred!

FRED

(not amused)

So what now? How do we get back to our own time? Or -- do we?

KIM

(taking a long drag)

I like it here. Can you smoke in the movies? Can I bring my girlfriends. Better not, though. She actually is Japanese --

FEYNMAN

Oppy and I have a plan to close the loop. Can't leave it open, you know.

KIM

Another lightning flash?

FEYNMAN

Exactly. (Looks at Kim's watch) I was going to order us coffee, but it's getting late.

Feynman knocks on the door. The captain opens it.

FEYNMAN

Bring the Jeep around, Captain, if you will. I'm taking these two with me, through the range.

FRED

(holds up cuffs)

What about these?

FEYNMAN

(conspiratorially)

Leave them on or people will talk. You are still prisoners, remember.

Feynman follows them out of the classroom. Before leaving he pauses and expertly removes the clip from the .45. Puts the clip in his pocket and jams the pistol into his belt.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE JEEP. NIGHT.

The captain is driving under streetlights. Feynman in the front seat. Fred and Kim handcuffed together in the back.

The Jeep pulls up at the guardpost and the captain hands the MP a folded paper. The MP unfolds it and reads it, refolds it and hands it back. Salutes.

The captain salutes him back, then looks at Feynman. Gets a nod and steps out of the Jeep. Fred watches all this intently.

Feynman slides into the driver's seat. Grinds the gears. Starts off, killing the Iccp. Restarts it. They buck off into the darkness, leaving the guardpost and the lights behind.

FRED

What was that all about?

FEYNMAN

The Privilege of Science -- Mystery. (Grinding gears) 'Scuse my driving. Kid from Queens, you know.

KIM

Wish you could see my Iccp. It's a direct descendant of this one but it has AC, automatic, CD player.

FEYNMAN

What's a CD player? Is that like the LCD display?

FRED

You're going to kill us, aren't you?

Kim is startled by this. Feynman is not; he is concentrating on driving as they lurch into the darkness.

FRED

You're going to shoot us. That's your so-called plan, isn't it?

KIM

(angrily, to Fred)

What the hell are you talking about, Fred? He's saving our lives!

FRED

(bitterly)

Oh yeah? Tell him, Doctor Feynman. Tell him your plan.

The Jeep bounces on a dirt road, into the trees. Darker and darker.

FEYNMAN

(noisily grinding gears)

There's nothing to tell. I'm sending you back to your own time. Your own lives.
That's the plan.

FRED

And that's your time machine, right? The captain's .45.

KIM

You guys are joking, right? (Holds up cuffs) Unlock these things!

FEYNMAN

Can't do it. That letter is from Oppy. We looked for a more elegant solution but there's no time, no pun intended. We can't experiment here. This loop-singularity is interesting, maybe even more interesting than the project itself. But it threatens the entire war effort.

FRED

You win the war. We win the war!

FEYNMAN

So you tell me. But maybe that's because we close the loop. Who knows?
Unfortunately, I'm not authorized to find out.

Feynman stops the Jeep. Pulls on the emergency brake with a LOUD RATCHETING SOUND. Leaves headlamps on.

Takes a clipboard off the dash and gets out of the Jeep.

FEYNMAN

We get out here. It's all set up. Come on, guys. Don't make this hard.

Fred and Kim look at each other grimly and refuse to move. They sit tight in the back of the Iccp, backlighted from the headlamps.

Feynman draws the .45 from his belt.

FEYNMAN

Come on, you won't feel a thing. I promise.

KIM

(angrily)

You can't even fucking drive, and you want us to believe you know how to use a gun!

FEYNMAN

Look, if we don't send you back the loop will stay open. It might even expand. Plus, you have your entire life to live in your own time. What are you going to do here? Join the Army?

KIM

(wants to believe it)

You sure it won't hurt?

FEYNMAN

I don't think so. This is a .45.

KIM

I know what the hell it is! (Still wants to believe) And we'll be back in our own time?

FEYNMAN

And this will never have happened. Think of it as a preview of life, before your life begins. I don't see how you could even remember it.

FRED

But then it will happen! We'll go on the hike and it will all happen again. Just like it's happening now.

FEYNMAN

Aha! The physics professor. Very perceptive -- Fred, isn't it? That's the other part of the plan. Come up here, in the light.

Fred and Kim climb awkwardly and reluctantly out of the back of the Jeep. They follow Feynman to the front of the Jeep. Feynman hands Fred the clipboard.

FEYNMAN

Write yourself a letter telling yourself NOT to go on the hike. I'll mail it right before I die. When is it -- approximately?

FRED

(bitterly)

Ten years ago. 1988. August. Cancer. A long, excruciating, painful death.

FEYNMAN

I don't blame you for being pissed off, Fred. But we all die, okay? How many of us get to live twice?

KIM

And die twice.

FEYNMAN

Well, that too. But you can't have one without the other.. Come on!

Feynman hands Fred a pencil. Fred studies it in the dim light. It is printed with a slogan: "RICHARD DARLING, I LOVE YOU! PUTSY."

Fred looks at Feynman and relents. He tries to write but his right hand is cuffed to Kim.

FRED

I'm right-handed.

FEYNMAN

(to Kim)

You write it, then.

KIM

I'm left-handed.

FEYNMAN

Bullshit. Come on, guys, don't make this any harder than it is!

Fred holds the clipboard while Kim writes. Feynman lights a cigarette.

FEYNMAN

Don't get too specific. That might be dangerous.

KIM

How about, "Do not go hiking near Oak Ridge, November 17, 1998."

FEYNMAN

Don't mention Oak Ridge.

KIM

How about, "Do not leave Knoxville."

FEYNMAN

That should do it.

Feynman takes the clipboard. Kim's hands are shaking. Fred is cool, studying Feynman.

FRED

You didn't send it, did you?

FEYNMAN

Why don't you guys turn around? It's better for everybody if you turn around.

FRED

If you had sent it, all this would never happen. We wouldn't be here.

FEYNMAN

It's not that simple. Maybe time reverberates. Maybe there's a delay factor. Maybe --

FRED

Maybe you wanted to see what would happen.

FEYNMAN

(irritated)

I don't deny that it's possible. How should I know what went wrong? You're the guys from the future, not me. But we can and will fix it. Now turn around, dammit.

KIM

Don't I get a last cigarette?

FEYNMAN

We don't have time. Here, you can have the last drag of mine.

With a sudden, athletic move, Kim grabs the gun and wrenches it from Feynman's grasp. Now he holds the .45 on Feynman while Fred, handcuffed to Kim, watches with mingled relief, horror, fascination -- and fear.

KIM

Surely you are joking, Mr. Feynman?

FEYNMAN

Come on, guys, this can never work. You have to go back, even if it's just to stop the trip. Otherwise, what're you gonna do, stay here and meet yourselves, over and over?

KIM

Beats a .45 slug in the back of the head. (Puts the gun in Feynman's face)
Unlock these cuffs or I blow your fucking head off.

FEYNMAN

(opens hands, Christlike)

Go ahead. Pull the trigger. Blow away the Manhattan Project, the war effort, the entire future.

Fred puts his free hand on Kim's gun arm.

FRED

He's right, Kim. There must be a better way.

KIM

Better than what? No way I...

A SHOT. Kim falls dead -- dragging Fred to his knees.

Fred looks up. He is startled to see HIMSELF, in an Army uniform, holding an M-1 carbine. FRED2 has just shot Kim in the back of the head.

FEYNMAN

I was beginning to wonder.

FRED2

You always wonder.

Fred2 bends down and pries the .45 from Kim's fingers and hands it to Feynman. Feynman takes the clip from his pocket and clicks it into the .45.

FRED

It -- wasn't loaded?

FEYNMAN

No way. Time is elastic. You can't change the past or the future but you better be damn careful with the present. (Chambers a round and clicks off the safety) Now turn around, Fred. Seriously. Please.

FRED

Fuck you. (Looks from Feynman to Fred2) Fuck you both! If you're going to shoot me, do it like a man. Face to face.

Fred2 watches impassively, still holding the M-1. Fred tries to back away, dragging Kim's body.

FEYNMAN

I hate this part. I really do.

Feynman aims the .45 at Fred and closes his eyes, just as --

CLANG! Fred is hit from behind with a shovel and falls sprawling beside Kim's body.

KIM2 steps out of the shadows, also in uniform. Holding a GI foxhole shovel. He wipes off the shovel and puts it in the back of the Jeep.

Feynman looks at Fred2, who shakes his head. Feynman steps forward with the .45 and finishes off Fred with another LOUD BANG. Fred2 flinches.

Feynman sticks the .45 back in his belt. He lights a cigarette. His hands are shaking.

FEYNMAN

Did you finish digging?'

KIM2

Don't I always finish digging?

He walks off into darkness.

FEYNMAN

Yeah, but this is the last time, I hope. I'll give you guys some light.

Feynman steps over to the Jeep and turns on the spotlight mounted on the driver's side. Shines it into the woods to show a wide, shallow grave, freshly dug amid the trees.

Kim2 is dragging both bodies toward it by the short handcuff chain. He looks up like a deer caught in the spotlight.

Fred2, reaches over Feynman and turns off the spot and the headlights.

FRED2

It's easier in the dark.

FEYNMAN

Whatever.

KIM2 (o.s.)

Come on, Fred. I'll bury you but I'm not going to bury me. Too fucking creepy. By half.

FRED2

Okay okay.

Fred2 puts the M-1 in the Jeep and picks up the shovel. He walks off into the

darkness, leaving Feynman alone in the dim light.

Sound of SHOVEL from O.S. Feynman sits on the Jeep; lights his last cigarette. Crumples the pack. Beats a bongo tattoo on the Jeep fender.

Kim2 appears at Feynman's side.

KIM2

One more.

FEYNMAN

(Shows the empty pack)

I'm out. I thought you were quitting, anyway.

Kim2 plucks the cigarette from Feynman's mouth.

KIM2

Very funny. That was now. This is then.

FEYNMAN

I just thought of something. Seriously, Kim. Maybe it's smoking now, before you're born, that makes it so hard to quit later. Think about it.

KIM2

Whatever.

After several long, luxuriant drags, Kim2 hands Feynman his cigarette and disappears into the shadows.

FRED2 (o.s.)

Okay. Ready?

KIM2 (o.s.)

I guess.

FRED2 (o.s.)

Okay!

FEYNMAN

Coming.

He checks the .45. Stubs out his cigarette on the hood of the Jeep. Field strips butt. Wipes ashes off hood. Walks off into the darkness.

KIM2. (o.s.)

You should have mailed the fucking letter.

FEYNMAN (o.s.)

Who says I won't this time? You shouldn't have grabbed the gun.

KIM2 (o.s.)

Surely you are joking, Mr. Feynman. Then you would have missed all this.

FRED2.

Hey guys, can we just do it, once and for all, this time?

A SHOT. A flash of LIGHTNING. Another SHOT.

THUNDER and more LIGHTNING. The camera POV moves AWAY from the Jeep. Flashes of LIGHTNING reveal Feynman, a silhouette with a gun, looking down at the ground. He sticks the gun into his belt.

Then darkness and silence.

In the middle distance, the Jeep starts up. Headlights. A grinding of gears. The Jeep bucks away, awkwardly.