

## THESE ARE THE TIMES

by JOHN G. HEMRY

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*Illustrated by William Warren*

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### **Practical time travel could make a historian's job a lot simpler—or a lot more complicated!**

Like different people, some places and times in the past attract a lot more attention than others. Sometimes a particular there and then only needs a few Temporal Interventionists dropping by before every question is pretty much answered. Lady Godiva, for example, who really did do her bareback ride, but no one who saw her picture in action once wanted to see it again. They probably forgave the taxes just so she'd put her clothes back on.

Other places get a fairly constant stream of TIs either trying to change things for their clients or trying to collect information from the past. It's hard to visit Washington, D.C. anytime during the first three centuries of the United States, for example, without tripping over fellow TIs.

Then there's very specific there and thens, places and times where something special happened, a turning point, and everyone wants to be there.

Like Boston, Massachusetts, in April 1775 C.E.

I'd landed what should have been a nice, simple job. No Interventions this time by someone wanting to ensure Great-Great-Great-etc.-Uncle Ned made it to Lexington Green so they'd have a hero in the family instead of an ancestor who'd stayed in bed with a hangover that morning, or someone wanting to murder Paul Revere or poison his horse. That stuff could get hazardous, especially with so many TIs from different centuries clustered in this here and now all trying to either carry out their own Interventions or stop someone else from achieving their Intervention.

There wasn't anything dangerous in my job description. I was supposed to jump back uptime before sunset on the eighteenth, well before serious shooting started, and any travel by me near decision points or critical individuals would be

finished well before then. No, all I had to worry about was being caught in the crossfire between TIs fighting before that time to either create or block Interventions. Unfortunately, this here and now had a lot of crossfire, and as a TI myself, I looked entirely too much like one of the combatants, so I stayed as alert as anyone else who knew a secret war was underway around them. That's aside from the fact that I was trying to blend in with the locals, who were also ready and willing to commit potentially homicidal actions against each other.

I'd been sent back by the Virtual City project, whose latest plan was to record everything said and done in Boston and the nearby surrounding area on 18 and 19 April 1775. Important places, like where the Sons of Liberty had met, had long since been bugged, so you could get detailed transcripts of everything said by anyone of any importance in the city on those days. But the Virtual City project aimed to create a visual and auditory record of the entire place and time. Once all of the data from the thousands of bugs was integrated, individuals several centuries from 1775 would be able to "walk" down the streets of this here and now, go into just about any building, and hear and see what had actually happened to anyone, not just the famous people.

Historians loved it, people who enjoyed soap operas loved it, privacy advocates screamed bloody murder and pointed out that people farther uptime could be doing the same thing to us. But the law said no such project could include any living person, so not enough people who were alive objected to it. And like every other TI, my implanted personal assistant made sure I was invisible to the bugs, so no future voyeurs would be eyeing me. Historians insisted on that so we wouldn't mess up the record, which is sort of ridiculous since TIs spend a good part of their time messing up history. It's what we do. Historians love us for the facts we can tell them and hate us for changing the facts we tell them.

But I wasn't out to change anything this time. My job consisted of walking down a preplanned grid of streets while the bug deployment gear built into the heavy coat I wore spat out bugs according to its own programming. To the casual observer here and now who got close enough to one, the bugs looked like gnats as they flitted into position on buildings or inside windows and doors to observe activity inside. Each had a nice array of visual and audio recording gear that would send their data to collection arrays, which I and other TIs had dropped off in various places where they looked like rocks. If any local picked one up, they'd feel like rocks, too.

All I had to do was keep one internal eye focused on the map my implanted Assistant named Jeannie displayed my route on, and one external eye on the assorted denizens of Boston, other obstacles to be avoided, and anything

suspicious or dangerous.

Not exactly safe, but not the most hazardous job I'd ever had, either. Everything went fine until I realized somebody was following me.

He was aristocratic looking, fair haired, wearing very nice clothes, and seemed the sort of guy who robbed people by embezzling from the bank he owned rather than the sort who followed someone down an alley and hit them on the head. But he kept showing up in my peripheral vision and that got me worried.

I finally turned quickly and focused on him for a moment before turning away again. *Jeannie, lock on. Can you ID this guy?* Internal communications come in very useful at such times.

*Negative, Jeannie responded. You've never encountered him before, but he's not a local. He does have an implanted time-jump mechanism. I can't be certain from this distance, but it seems a couple of generations more primitive than yours, placing the man's origin a little more than a century before our home now.*

*Any weapons?*

*None detected.*

Which didn't mean none were there. But I had to know what this guy wanted with me, and accosting him in public was less risky than letting him choose the moment. I turned the next corner as my preplanned route directed, but then pivoted and took several quick steps back to the corner just in time to meet my tail as he came around. "Hi, citizen," I greeted him in a low voice as the crowds of locals walked past us, using the anachronistic term on purpose to get his reaction.

He glowered at me. "You've got your nerve." High-class British accent, and very well done. I wondered if it was authentic. "Do you think I don't know what you're doing?"

"Since you've got an implanted Assistant and jump mechanism I'm sure you know what I'm doing. So what? It's not about you."

His glower changed into a snarl. "I suppose it's just a coincidence that you're planting sensors in the same area where I was waylaid tomorrow."

"As far as I know, yes." Wait a minute. If he was here tomorrow and knew what had happened, that meant he was also probably here today. "You

doubled-back? You've got dual-presence in this here and now, and both within this city?" Instead of answering directly, he smiled unpleasantly. "Don't you know what that can do to someone's mind?" No one knows why, but being consciously present in the same here and now more than once can create a lot of problems that mimic old ailments like schizophrenia and paranoia. The closer you physically are, the worse the effects are.

"That's only a problem for weak-minded mongrels," he replied with that supercilious sneer that only a many-generational member of the upper class can really carry off. "You think yourself very superior. But you've met your match."

"Look, I'm not—"

"You won't stop me!" He must be one of the guys trying an Intervention. I took a moment to wonder what, but it didn't matter much. Everyone who made any difference in the events of the next few days had TI bodyguards secretly following them everywhere. Every building that mattered had other TIs guarding them and sweeping them for bombs and such. The people who wanted to keep history the way it more or less was in general had a lot more money than the ones who wanted to change things, and could hire more TIs to protect turning points in history. Some of them must have taken out this Brit tomorrow.

His sneer turned contemptuous. "I know your kind. Sit back safely, give the orders, send out your hooligans to do your dirty work while you pull the strings within your lair. It's a regular Moriarty you consider yourself, isn't it?"

"Actually, no."

He leaned close, his face reddening with anger. "You stopped me tomorrow, but you won't stop me tomorrow this time. Try to sic your hounds on me again and I'll be ready."

I leaned a little closer, too, emphasizing my words. "I don't know you, I don't care what you're trying to do, I'm not here on Intervention or Counter-Intervention or Counter-Counter-Intervention. I'm just working for a data collection project. Go away and I promise you any further interactions between us will be purely by chance."

"You lie. I have my eye on you Moriarty. Neither you nor your ruffians will be safe if you try to cross me again."

I started losing my temper, too. "Listen, you moron. I'm not Moriarty, but if you mess with *me* I'll do a Wellington on you. Understand?"

His eyes narrowed, he shifted his weight, and I braced for him to jump me. I've got a tranquilizer crystal shooter embedded in one finger that can knock out someone for a long time, and if necessary, I'd use it on this loon. But he just glanced around, taking in the crowds passing by, then stepped back slightly. "Right, Yank. Think you can rule the world, eh? And all time as well. Not bloody likely. Keep yourself and your brutes away from me and my plans." Then he spun about and vanished rapidly around the corner.

I blew out a long breath, relaxed, then started walking my route again. *Jeannie, any idea what that last little speech of his was about?*

*He seems to believe that you're a citizen of the United States, which supplanted the United Kingdom as the world's most powerful political entity.*

That figured. Someone out to try to cause the U.K. to stay on top of the world longer than it had. Since I didn't intend going anywhere near any potential targets for someone like that, he'd hopefully go off and follow some other innocent TI through the streets of Boston.

My route took me down toward the docks, where the smell of the sea, rotting fish, and raw sewage got worse. Even though the port had been closed by British authorities since the Boston Tea Party a while back, there was still plenty of street traffic here. The narrow lane ahead was partially blocked by a cart holding some of those fish, so I worked through the throng squeezing past on one side.

Standing against a building up ahead was a man wearing a cloak draped around him, his tricorne hat pulled low on his forehead. He looked up as I drew near and our eyes locked.

I came to a dead stop, drawing some mumbles of anger from those who had to suddenly avoid me.

The boat-cloaked figure stepped forward and extended one hand. "Thomas? I'm Palmer. I trust you remember me from London?"

"Palmer?" I took the hand, which would have been slim on a man. "Fancy meeting you here."

"I had business." Her voice sounded deeper than I recalled, probably because her own Assistant was tweaking her vocal cords so she'd pass as a male. The locally fashionable male wig helped, too, as did the clothes. Locals expecting to see a man would see one. "It's nice to see you here and now."

Jeannie actually sounded happy. *I've established contact with her Assistant. This meeting is after our last encounter in London but prior to any other encounters.* That's the sort of thing TIs have to straighten out right away when they meet someone they know. Have I already seen you again before or after this? What did we say or do? It gets confusing. But no problem this time.

I realized I was grinning like an idiot. "Yeah. Very nice to see you, too."

"Going somewhere?" Pam asked. I nodded. "May I accompany you?" Another nod, and we set off down the street, speaking in low voices.

"Pam, what brings you to Boston?"

"Palmer," she murmured back. "I get really tired of enduring male attitudes toward women in downtime places like this, and even more tired of enduring the clothes they're expected to wear. It's easier to pass as a man at this time of year when I can wear a cloak. What are you up to?"

"Something called the Virtual City project. Do you know about it?" Maybe she'd even walked through it.

"Annie told me about it," Pam advised. Annie must be her Assistant. "She's happy to be talking to Jeannie again."

"Yeah, Jeannie's thrilled, too." I gave Pam a speculative look. She lived way uptime from me. "I guess you could tell me how the project comes out."

She grinned back at me. "Could. Won't."

Because TIs don't share things they know about other TIs' futures. That's the rule anyway, though I know of TIs who've broken it, either to help another TI or because they want to mess up another TI. "I hope the fact that you're smiling means nothing serious happens to me."

Pam looked away, studying the buildings around us. "Serious? I don't know. Harmful, no, I don't know of anything like that."

Enigmatic at best, but she didn't seem willing to go into more detail and I couldn't press her on the issue. "So what brings a nice girl like you to a here and now like this?"

"Boston? Boston's full of nice girls here and now," Pam replied.

“Not down by the docks.”

“I wouldn’t know. I’m not a sailor.”

“Are you doing an Intervention you can’t talk about?”

She shook her head. “No. Data collection. I need to be in Lexington the day after tomorrow.”

“The day after tomorrow? The nineteenth? That’s the day.” I gave her a frankly skeptical look. “Data collection? Lexington on 19 April 1775 has more bugs planted in it than the Amazon rainforest. There’s still something they haven’t got even in your time?”

Pam nodded. “The shot.”

“The shot?”

“The shot.”

I got it then. The ‘shot heard ‘round the world.’ Two forces facing each other, American militia and British regulars, both ordered not to fire unless fired upon. A shot rings out from somewhere, and both sides start shooting. The start of the American Revolution. But who fired that first shot? “They still haven’t found the shooter?”

“Nope.” Pam spread her hands in frustration. “It wasn’t from either of the forces on the Green. They’ve tried triangulating, but the sound echoes and reechoes in weird ways. It can’t be tied to any window or door or open area. Sound analysis says it’s a gunshot of some kind, but can’t identify any weapon, of this period or any other, that matches it. So I’m planting more gear to try to nail down the spot and find the person responsible.” She caught my expression. “What’s the matter?”

“Lexington then and there is full of TIs and crazies from a half dozen centuries, Pam. They must be tripping over each other. I’m just worried.”

She smiled at me. “About me? We saved London together, remember? I’m a big girl, and unlike certain guys I know I carry heavy artillery.” Pam twitched her arm then turned her hand slightly, and I saw her pistol gleaming in her palm, all smooth curves, beautiful and deadly. A description that also matched Pam in some ways, I realized. But in good ways. Then she turned her hand again and the

weapon vanished. "Thanks for caring, though."

"I just met a crazy a little while ago," I told her. "Some Brit with a snooty attitude who called me a Yank. He's planning something."

Pam shook her head. "You mean like him?" She looked to one side where a seaman in a captain's uniform was passing. "Or her?" She turned her head and gazed at an elegant woman wearing a dress that looked like it must be worth a lot here and now. "They've all got jump mechs. Maybe one of them will take care of your Brit."

"I hope so. I swear he would've attacked me if we'd been alone. You can spot them that far away, huh?" Pam came from a century uptime from me, and had correspondingly more advanced capabilities for her Assistant.

"Yup." She paused for a moment. "So how come you never came up to see me?"

"Because I couldn't raise the money." Making a time jump for a date was the sort of luxury only the insanely rich indulged in, but I'd tried to see if I could swing it. "I've heard a lot of loan dealers laugh at me lately. I sure am glad we ran into each other here."

Pam gave me another smile, and I knew her Assistant had automatically analyzed my physiological reactions and told her that I was being truthful. Sometimes that's annoying, but this time I was glad she didn't have to wonder. "Same here. I couldn't afford a jump down to your time on my own."

*She's not lying,* Jeannie told me.

*I already knew that.* Pam wouldn't lie to me. I checked my internal map. "I've got about another kilometer to go this afternoon and then I get to break for the night. They don't want me wandering around in the evening with so many British soldiers all over the place watching for suspicious Colonials. Are you free?"

"Sure am." She smiled just the way I remembered from when we'd someday meet in London, and we set off along my route, talking about this, that, and everything. I didn't notice the snooty Brit following me anymore so I stopped worrying about him and concentrated on Pam.

Pam led me back to the inn where she had a room. "How'd you manage a private room?" I wondered.

"It's small, and I paid plenty, but I couldn't exactly share." She sighed as we entered the smoky gloom of the inn's main room. A glowing fire cast more light than the lanterns set around the room, and most of the tables were occupied by men with pipes, their earnest visages as they debated politics illuminated by the radiance from their pipe bowls. Jeannie went to work filtering the second-hand smoke out of my lungs, suppressing my sneeze reflex and curbing the irritation to my eyes so they didn't water. A good Assistant never lets you down. "Want a drink?" Pam asked.

"How's the beer here?"

"Safe enough. Not bad. Have you tried flip?"

"No. Should I?"

Pam grinned again and beckoned to a serving wench. One of the neat things about being a TI is that you actually get to be served by real serving wenches. This one had seen better days, or maybe this had just been a long day, but she smiled beguilingly at Pam, who must have appeared a pretty good-looking young man through the haze filling the air. "Flip for two," Pam directed.

I watched doubtfully as the woman broke three eggs into a big mug, added some irregular brown lumps of sugar, tossed in a couple of jiggers of rum and brandy, beat the mess vigorously, then filled the mug the rest of the way with beer. Carrying the mug over to the fireplace, she yanked a glowing hot poker out of the fire and plunged it into the concoction for a few moments until foam rose up, then brought what certainly qualified as a 'mixed drink' to our table along with another smile for Pam.

Then she did it once more and brought me the second mug, though Pam got the smile again.

I tasted cautiously. "How dangerous is this?"

"If your shots are up to date and your Assistant is on the ball? Not very." Pam took a big drink. "It grows on you."

"I can believe it grows *in* you." I gave the server a glance where she was leaning against the bar. "If that woman could see under your cloak she'd be disappointed."

"That's me," Pam admitted lightly. "Breaking hearts all through downtime. Usually it's men's hearts, though."

“You damn near broke mine,” I agreed.

Pam’s smile disappeared. “Really?”

“Yeah. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to contact you a century uptime from me. It’s not easy. There’s too many ways for a message to go astray, and I needed to make sure you wouldn’t see it before we’d met.”

“That’d be hard to set up,” she agreed, taking another long draw on her mug. “People with TI mindsets don’t pay attention to ‘do not open file until X date’ instructions. Drink your flip.”

“Are you trying to get me drunk?” She laughed, because Assistants only let someone get a buzz on before they start filtering out the alcohol. We can drink pure grain alcohol all night and not feel it. “Look, about the day after tomorrow—”

Pam made a shushing gesture. “Finish your drink and we’ll go up to my room to talk in private.” Then she grinned again. “Hey, I invited you to come up and this time you can.”

A pair of empty mugs later I followed Pam toward the stairs after she snagged a lit lantern. A harried-looking woman intercepted us on the way to the stairs and gave me and then Pam a hard look. Pam obligingly hauled out some coins and dropped them into the woman’s palm, who smiled in a way that showed teeth in serious need of dental care and hustled away. “Innkeeper,” Pam explained as we went up the narrow, steep stairs. “She thought I was trying to sneak someone else into the room.”

It was common practice here and now for men to share beds just to save money. The landlady must have thought Pam was trying to sublet half of ‘his’ bed and pocket the cash. “You paid for me?”

“It was easier than worrying about her spying on us while you’re up there. I’ll put it on my expense account.” Pam led the way down a corridor as narrow as the staircase, to another small set of steep stairs that led up again and ended in an even narrower door. “And, Annie says no one has disturbed my room.” She pulled open the door and gestured inside. “Welcome to the Boston Palace circa 1775 C.E.”

The room had a bed, a small dresser with a washbasin and cracked pitcher of water, and not much else except a small, high window in which sealed shutters made do in place of glass. Not that there was room for much more than that. Pam

waved me to the bed, set the lantern on the dresser, then sat down beside me. "Annie says we're clear of bugs, even the ones you're spreading around. She's got a beautiful suite of jamming capabilities."

Sitting close to Pam, I couldn't help thinking that she had some beautiful qualities, too. Pam pulled off the wig she'd been wearing and tossed it onto the dresser, then shrugged out of the cloak. Her coat was nicely cut to still do a pretty good job of concealing her woman's figure even without the cloak. "Now, don't worry about me," she added, her voice going back to its normal pitch now that we were alone. "I'm not going to get in anybody's way. I just need to deploy the gear and then step back and let it search for the shooter."

"At Lexington on 19 April 1775," I added.

"Do you know any reason why anyone would be targeting me?" she asked.

"No, but there was no reason for that guy to come after me, either. I don't think he was a TI. I think he was an amateur out to change history."

"You're probably right," Pam conceded. "Boston in April 1775 is the sort of then and there that attracts amateurs and fanatics."

"And he's here and now multiple times."

"You're kidding! What an idiot," Pam observed.

"You didn't seem that worried about running into yourself when we'll be in London," I pointed out.

"Of course I was. I just didn't want to admit that to some guy I'd just met. But this nutcase isn't after me. You keep your eye out for him and relax about me. I'm not in any more danger than you are."

That wasn't exactly reassuring. "You asked me up here just to tell me that?" I probably sounded a little angry and I was. I wanted Pam to take my worries seriously.

"Not just for that." She leaned over slightly, her shoulder brushing mine.

It felt comfortable up here, and the flip had left me with a happy buzz. I'd spent a lot of nights thinking about Pam, and here she was sitting beside me. Sitting real close beside me.

Pam looked over at me for a long moment, then stood up and peeled off her coat, dropping it onto the small dresser. When I'd first seen her well over a hundred years from now she'd been wearing clothes appropriate for an Edwardian English lady, which weren't exactly revealing. The cloak and coat she'd been wearing today didn't show much of what was underneath either. But now, though the light from the lantern wasn't great, it was plenty good enough to reveal that Pam looked very good in tight breeches.

She turned back to face me, caught my gaze and raised an eyebrow. "Care to share your thoughts?"

Since I was wearing tight breeches, too, she probably knew exactly what I was thinking. I just couldn't tell how she felt about it, but as John Paul Jones said (or would say in about twenty years or so) 'he who will not risk cannot win.' "I'm thinking I wish I didn't have to go back to the room I've got."

"Worried about British sentries?" Pam asked innocently.

Jeannie chose that moment to pipe up. *Her breathing is speeding up.*

*Thanks. Now go into passive mode.* "Not really. I'd just like to stay here with you tonight," I told Pam.

Her lips curved in a slow smile. "I was hoping you'd help me get out of all of these buttons. Just make sure you don't rip any. I need to wear this stuff again tomorrow, and I hate sewing."

As it turned out, I did rip a couple toward the end, but by that point Pam was as eager to get the clothing off as I was and didn't raise any fuss.

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I woke the next morning to the sound of water and looked over to see Pam standing next to me stark naked, her feet in a big shallow tin dish as she rinsed off soap. "If you want a bath, too, you'll need to use the same water," she cautioned.

"Oh boy."

Pam rolled her eyes in a silent commentary on males that must be part of women's genetic makeup, because I've seen it in every century and place I've ever visited. She towed off quickly and started pulling on things that needed buttoning, giving me an accusing look as she found a rip. I hastily cleaned up and started dressing as well, trying to think what I should say.

Pam checked herself in the small mirror when she'd got just about everything on, then suddenly turned to face me. "Confession time. I knew you'd be here and now."

My own half-formed speech, professing long-term interest but regret over the impossibility of a relationship when our home nows were a century apart, dissolved under a wave of surprise. "You did?"

"The TI central records said you'd worked the Virtual City project here and now."

I frowned. "Those records are confidential."

"Not anymore. They changed that a couple of decades ago. Or about eighty years from your home now. They figured it might help keep TIs from tripping over each other." She shrugged. "I used it to set up a meeting. I found someone who wanted a TI to make a run here and took the contract. The project records showed the routes you'd been assigned to cover."

"You wanted to meet me that much?" I must have sounded stupid, but it had never occurred to me that someone like Pam would go to that kind of trouble on my account.

"Yeah. I knew you'd never be able to set up a meeting with me since I was uptime from you. And ... you did seem kind of interested in that."

"Very interested," I agreed. "Should I say it?"

"Only if you want to, and mean it."

"Then I will. Pam, I fell in love with you in London. I didn't realize that until I met you again before then." She smiled happily. "I want to be with you long-term." Time for the cold water of reality. "But what are the odds that we'll be able to swing more meetings like this in the future in the past?"

"Not great," Pam admitted, then spoke in a rush. "Have you ever considered emigrating?"

"Emigrating?" That floored me. Sure, everyone thinks about it at one point or another, the chance to move to another time within the band of centuries where TIs operate from and make it your home now. But hardly anyone does. The rules are very tight, and the idea of leaving everything you know is hard to

stomach. So most people never really give it serious consideration. “You really mean that?”

“Yeah.” Pam sat down next to me again, looking at the floor, squeezing her interlocked hands together anxiously. “I didn’t know if I’d ask you, not absolutely for sure, not until I’d spent more time with you. But I do mean it. I can sponsor you. We worked really well together in the future. I couldn’t stop remembering the time we’ll spend together in London. I’ll have a great time with you there and then. I love you, too. And our Assistants like each other.”

“I noticed.” I took a deep breath. “What about you? Emigrating?”

She grimaced. “You know the rules, Tom. If I emigrated downtime I’d have to have my implanted tech downgraded to match your level. That would be like giving Annie a lobotomy. I can’t do that.”

“I wouldn’t ask you to. Sorry I didn’t remember that.”

“But if you came up with me, Jeannie would get an upgrade,” Pam pointed out, then looked slightly guilty at dangling that lure in front of me.

“Yeah. She would,” I agreed in tones designed to show I didn’t mind Pam bringing that up. I breathed deep again, thinking. It was a huge thing. And yet I’d been through century after century and never found anyone like Pam. What kind of idiot would turn down this opportunity? “Can I think about it for a little while? I think I’ll want to, but I need a little while, okay?”

Pam grinned and kissed me. “I’ve got another forty-two hours here. Long enough?”

“It ought to be.” I kissed her back. “Especially if we spend it in this bed.”

She laughed and shoved me away. “I’ve got work to do, and I bet you do, too. Besides, I don’t want to think you’re being motivated by nothing but lust.”

“There’s nothing wrong with lust,” I pointed out. “But, no. I wouldn’t consider emigrating on the basis of lust even for Helen of Troy.” Who *was* incredibly hot, though not even remotely blond like she used to be portrayed. Which was okay, because I’m a bit skittish around blondes after some negative experiences I’ve had.

“Helen was a slut,” Pam responded shortly. Female TIs tend to have strong opinions about Helen, maybe because male TIs tend to talk about her.

“Nothing like you,” I agreed quickly.

“Get your buttons buttoned,” Pam ordered, standing up and grabbing her wig. “I need to turn back into Palmer and check out routes to Lexington.”

“Are you staying there tonight?”

I must have sounded tragic because she grinned at me. “No. I can’t. Between the locals and all the TIs hiding in the bushes the place is full. I’ll scout the route today, then get in very early tomorrow and deploy my collection gear while everyone else is scrambling around watching each other. The focus of attention will be on the moving British troops and the Colonial VIPs then, so nobody will worry about one more TI moving through the countryside.”

“I’m not so sure. It’s not what you’re doing, Pam, it’s what some nutcase Interventionist might *think* you’re doing. Like the guy who threatened me.”

“You’ll wrap up your job this afternoon, right?” Pam answered. “Want to meet in Cambridge at sunset? I don’t want to have to worry about sneaking out of Boston tonight with the British trying to lock the place down. I was going to get dinner in Cambridge and maybe a little rest before I had to head back to Lexington.”

“Sure. I’ll see you there.” She’d avoided replying to my statement, and we both knew it. But like Pam had said, she was a big girl and she had a job to do.

Only after I’d agreed to meet her did I realize that I was supposed to jump out before sunset, returning to my home now. But it wouldn’t matter if I stayed a little longer since the jump back would cost the same. The Virtual City project wouldn’t cover my expenses after the scheduled end of the job, but that would be pocket change if I just stayed one more night.

We parted ways just outside the inn. I wanted to kiss her good-bye, but with Pam disguised as a man again that probably would’ve attracted the wrong kind of attention in this here and now. Instead we shook hands, Pam repeated “Cambridge, at sunset, where the main road from Boston enters town,” then she headed off to rent a horse while Jeannie popped up my map in my mind and I went to deploy bugs.

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Boston felt different today, in that just-before-a-thunderstorm sort of way.

I wondered if I was imagining it, but lots of locals were extra tense as if they sensed what I knew, that a decade of growing tension was about to burst and put history on a fundamentally different path. TIs were everywhere, giving me suspicious glances as I passed by. I recognized a few that I knew, dressed as soldiers or tradesmen or servants or ladies, all of them fully alert. We were inside the decisive events period, and those ready to try to change those events were already sparring with those trying to keep things unchanged, like unseen armies clashing beneath the surface of actions the locals were experiencing.

I covered the last street on my grid, my coat informed Jeannie that all of its bugs had been deployed, and I headed for the only ground path out of Boston. In this period the city was almost an island, connected to the mainland by a narrow stretch of land known as Boston neck. The British would be sealing off the neck tonight, but I should be early enough to get past them.

I managed to catch the local coach to Cambridge and reached the town well before sunset. Cambridge didn't have nearly as many TIs hidden among the populace, but once again I spotted one I knew. He meandered over to walk near me as I ambled down the road. "Business done or business to do?" he murmured to me.

"Done," I replied. "I'm supposed to jump out soon. You?"

"To do. I could use some help if you want to hang around a little longer. My employers pay really well."

"Thanks, but I'm meeting someone later."

His glance was skeptical. "I thought you were done."

"It's personal."

"A local?" He grinned. Some TIs loved the fact that they had the perfect opportunity to love them and leave them. "Has she got a friend?"

"It's personal," I repeated. "And I thought you were on a job."

"I'm free until just after sunset." He looked around casually. "If you're going to be anywhere around here after midnight be careful. It's not just the British regulars patrolling all over the place. There's TIs everywhere and most of them are armed and jumpy."

"Thanks for the warning. Take it easy yourself."

“Sure.” He paused as we reached the place where Cambridge stopped and fields began. “This your spot? I’ll see you around.”

“Hopefully not anytime soon,” I added. He winked and moved off.

Pam and her horse came trotting in while the sun was still a finger’s width above the horizon. She nodded wearily to me. “Damn redcoats everywhere, but I’ve got the route scoped out.”

“How long do you have?”

“I need to leave here by about nineteen hundred so I can move slowly and be ahead of the fuss around William Dawes when he comes through.” Pam dismounted and led her horse and me back into Cambridge. “I’ll have the horse taken care of while you and I spend some time.”

“Nineteen hundred?” I should have known that there wouldn’t be time for another romantic interlude. Not a physical one, at least. “You’re going to eat, right?”

“Yeah. No flip tonight, though.”

After Pam dropped her horse off at a stable for a rubdown and a nice bucket of molasses-soaked grain, we found a tavern and took a table in one corner. Between the background noise as the other diners discussed the rising level of tensions with British authorities and the haze of smoke from tobacco and the hearth fire, we had a pretty decent level of privacy as we dug into spit-roasted chicken. “I’m still worried,” I finally stated.

“That’s only allowed if you’re serious about me,” Pam replied, her eyes on mine.

“I’m serious.” Now or never, Tom. Jump through time all you want, but the odds were vanishingly small that I’d ever encounter this moment again. “I’ll go.”

“Go?”

“Emigrate. I don’t want to lose you. Now can I be worried?”

She smiled broadly. “Oh, I wish we weren’t in public, so I could kiss you. Yeah, worry away. But it’s okay. I’ve got the British patrols mapped out, I’ve spied on the activity of TIs planning Interventions and Counters around Lexington, so I

should be able to avoid any that might take me out on general principles, and Annie can tell me if any TIs get too close despite that." Pam saw my expression. "Hey, any man of mine has to avoid overprotectiveness."

"Understood." I exhaled and shrugged. "I know you're good. You don't need me holding your hand. Okay. How do we handle the emigration?"

"Here." She paused.

*I'm receiving a certified sponsor affidavit from Pam's Assistant Annie, Jeannie informed me. It conforms to authentication requirements for our home now.*

I gave Pam a look. "You had it ready?"

"I had confidence in you. Besides, there's not much chance we'll connect here after my job's done. You need to get out of here before *you* get hurt."

"I thought you said it was safe," I complained.

"Not for someone armed only with a single-shot tranq crystal," Pam pointed out. She smiled at me in a different way, then made a face. "Annie says I need to get going. Walk me to the stable."

It was plenty dark out now in that pre-industrial way that defines dark. She stopped short of the stable, in a patch of street very poorly illuminated, pulled me close, and kissed me hard. "I can't wait to see you in my home now."

"Pam? Did I ever meet anybody else in my own home now?"

She looked away, then back at me, meeting my eyes. "I didn't look. I didn't review your personal history at all, just the TI trip files. Because I didn't want to know."

And if I went uptime to be with her, I'd never know, either. Because Pam would have staged an Intervention in my future and her past, changing both. She had already changed my future, since I would have left this now already if not for wanting to meet her again. "That's okay. I wouldn't want to know either. If there ever would have been anyone else, she couldn't make me happier than you will."

Pam kissed me again, then broke contact abruptly. "See you in several centuries. When you emigrate uptime, Annie gave Jeannie directions on how to find me and exactly when to jump to. She also transferred all the credit I've got to

you. Between us, we'll be able to afford your jump uptime even though we'll be paying it off for a long time."

Pam seemed to have thought of everything. As I stood in the shadows and watched her mount up and ride out of Cambridge toward Lexington, I hoped she really had thought of everything.

Eventually I moved, knowing I should go ahead and jump back uptime. But some instinct made me fade into more shadows and watch the road that Pam had vanished down. I was still there when another figure led a horse out of a nearby stable, distinctly looked toward the place where Pam had left me and then down the road she'd taken, then mounted up and galloped after her.

I knew that man. Jeannie never forgets a detailed silhouette and she sees really well at night anyway. It was the aristocratic Brit who'd confronted me in Boston. And every indication was that he'd somehow followed me without my spotting him or Jeannie picking up his proximity, that he'd decided Pam was one of my 'hooligans,' and he was now after Pam.

I wouldn't be jumping uptime. I headed for a stable, hoping a horse would be available without too much delay and realizing I was about to charge down a road populated by edgy British military patrols and who knew how many trigger-happy TIs.

\* \* \* \*

I made it over Alewife Brook, then through the crossroads at the place that would someday be Arlington but was now Menotomy at about twenty-two thirty, narrowly avoiding a patrol of British regulars. Paul Revere and William Dawes would be leaving Boston now to warn everyone that the main body of the British regulars was coming out. I was about even with Pierce's Hill at twenty-three hundred, when I knew the British expedition was departing Boston.

Jeannie's warning came a fraction of a second too late. Something clipped my left side, paralyzing it. My horse screamed with fright and bolted to the right while I failed to keep my saddle with half my body not working and kept going left. I hit the road with the half of me that could feel it, naturally, then lay there trying to breathe.

A pair of boots came within my field of vision. "Game over, mate."

"I'm not playing," I managed to gasp, wondering who this TI was working for.

“Not anymore.” Everything went dark.

\* \* \* \*

I woke up with a raging post-stun headache. *Time?*

*Twenty-three thirty*, Jeannie answered promptly.

I’d only been out for half an hour?

*It was an older model stun system*, Jeannie continued. *I managed to nullify some of the effect. The TI responsible was himself ambushed as he lurked near us and was taken off by three other TIs.*

It had started then, but I was stuck on the road without a horse and still a long ways from Lexington. I managed to get to my feet, staggering from the lingering effects of the stun weapon, and wavered back toward the road. As I did, I heard a horse galloping my way. If I could stop that guy and get his horse—

*I would advise against leaving cover at this time*, Jeannie insisted. *If my estimates are correct, all hell is about to break loose.*

When Jeannie’s right, she’s right. Given the time of night, I realized that the man I was hearing might well be William Dawes, Paul Revere’s southern route counterpart. If he was ... I hit the ground and tried to be invisible.

Judging from what happened next, it was Dawes.

Jeannie alerted me to energy discharges and jumpers arriving down the road where the hoof beats sounded, everything coming closer fast. I spotted a man on a horse thundering down the road, just about the time a figure in a stealth suit rose up less than a hundred meters away from me in the direction of the rider. The TI would be invisible to any local, but Jeannie could pinpoint him or her for me.

The stealth-suited TI leveled a weapon, then dropped as a stun charge hit. Moments later the other TI who’d fired the stun charge fell, then two more TIs appeared and took out whoever had nailed the second TI. But then the stealth-suited TI reappeared, having recovered somewhere in the future and jumped back to try to finish the job. One of the last set of TIs fell, then the remaining one grappled with the first TI and knocked them both down.

Dawes rode past the battle scene, and as he drew even with me, two more TIs appeared on the opposite of the road from me, weapons drawn. What looked like half a dozen more TIs materialized around them as the air filled with energy discharges. Another TI jumped into view just beyond the ring of six TIs, but instead of firing at Dawes aimed across the road and sent a blast into the bushes entirely too close to me. A body flopped to the ground near me, then another figure appeared, took a weapon from it, then was itself grappled by another person.

And so it went. Interventions. Counter-Interventions. Counter-Counter-Interventions. Etcetera. I kept my head down, watching as William Dawes rode up the road toward Lexington oblivious to the silent, stealthy running battle raging alongside him every step of the way as some TIs tried to stop him and others tried to ensure he made it. I found myself wondering if Dawes had made it originally, or if Paul Revere had, or if those defending them were actually the ones doing the Interventions to change history. The original truth, if such a thing had ever existed, had long since been lost in the web of interferences by time travelers.

People used to think, and many people still do think, that causality is linear through time. Cause has to precede effect. But the truth is that causality forms a circle through time, where cause may be hard to identify but may occur apparently after effect. Sometimes what you think is the cause turns out to be the effect. The old time-travel paradoxes weren't real because they didn't recognize that, but we couldn't learn it until we were able to travel through time and start identifying all of the deliberate and accidental Interventions going on. The more we learn about that, the more we see how tangled and interwoven the circles of cause and effect and cause are, the more people wonder if there ever was a base reality, because history as we know it already reflects countless changes from what might have been.

But for tonight, I just needed to get to Lexington and ensure whatever changes took place didn't include anything bad happening to Pam. I started walking. Midnight. Revere should be in Lexington now, if he hadn't been stopped. Dawes would get there about zero zero thirty, then they'd leave for Concord with some other guy. Well behind me, the British regulars had disembarked at Lechmere Point and were marching toward me. I had a good lead on them, but I'd need every extra moment, since I couldn't just walk into Lexington along the main road the British soldiers would use. There'd be way too many locals and TIs posted along that route.

When the road bent up toward Lexington I followed it until another road cut

off to the left. It would take me south of the town, where another road would lead me straight up into Lexington along a route that shouldn't be nearly as hazardous. I was pretty sure it would be the same route Pam had taken. And the Brit following her. They were likely both still on horseback, with substantial leads on me. I walked faster.

\* \* \* \*

There seemed to be locals everywhere as I approached Lexington from the south, but they weren't hard to avoid. The Colonials wanted to force a confrontation with the British troops, so they were standing out in the open or walking into town. I merged with them when I could, blending in. Most had muskets of varying age, but I wasn't the only one not carrying a weapon, so I didn't stand out on that account. The older men were serious and grim, the younger ones hopped up with excitement and joking with each other. Funny how it's always that way. I remembered the Roman teenage conscripts laughing and fooling around before Cannae.

Being a TI can be damned depressing sometimes.

When I got close to the town it was still long enough before dawn that the gloom made it easy for me to fade off to the side so I could approach cautiously from overland. As it got light enough to see faces well, suspicious locals might detain me as a spy for the British authorities since no one here would know me. Unfortunately, I had no idea where Pam was planning on deploying her gear. Jeannie could tell me where bugs had been placed in Lexington before my particular job, though, so I could guess what spots had been judged in need of better coverage.

There were so many TIs around that Jeannie kept calling warnings and I stopped paying close enough attention. Mistake.

"Hold it." The voice was very soft but very clear. I froze obediently, then turned my head enough to see someone step slightly out of cover, a weapon in one hand pointed straight at me. "Tom? What the hell are you doing here?"

It was the same TI who I'd met in Cambridge yesterday afternoon. "I've got to help somebody."

His weapon didn't move. "You told me you were done working here and now."

"I am. This is personal. She needs my help."

He shook his head. "Tom, you can't get that involved with locals. You know that. Whoever she is was dead and dust before your ancestors were born."

"She's not a local!"

"Another TI? You dog. I never would have guessed. But I can't let you stage an Intervention or help some other TI do it."

I unfroze enough to make a pleading gesture. "She's not here and now for an Intervention. Just data collection. I swear it. The guy who's after her is planning an Intervention."

"Who is this guy?"

"I don't know. Some Brit. Looks like his family has been interbreeding with horses for generations. You know the type."

My acquaintance grinned. "Old line nobility? Yeah. I didn't see anybody like him on this route, but I didn't get here until after I'd helped make sure William Dawes made it through."

"This Brit left Cambridge on horseback early in the evening, so he probably got through here before you got in place."

"Probably," the other TI agreed. "And you want to stop him?" I nodded. "You're sure he's planning an Intervention?" I nodded again. He raised his weapon and stepped back slightly. "Then right here and now we're working for the same side. Go ahead."

"Thanks," I gasped in relief, but he stopped me from running on ahead with a gesture.

"It's dangerous going into that town right now, Tom. Is this babe worth it?"

"Yeah."

"I wish I'd met her before you did. Good luck." He faded back into cover, and I headed the rest of the way into Lexington as cautiously as I could. It felt like I was in one of those training simulations where enemies are on all sides waiting to pop out. Once among the buildings of the small town of Lexington, I couldn't sneak from place to place, so I walked, trying to look non-threatening.

I came around a corner, and even though the sun wasn't up yet I recognized Pam. She was maybe fifteen meters away, her back to me, walking very slowly down one side of the street next to the houses there. I recognized her movements as being those of someone listening to her Assistant on where to go to deploy sensors.

But she was, clearly, fine. I'd run a lot of risks and made a fool of myself for nothing. The best thing to do now was to jump out of here before Pam saw me.

Pam suddenly staggered, then went down limp. The door to the home she'd been passing opened and a man stepped partly out to grab her arms and pull her inside. He was wearing a different outfit, the uniform of a British regular officer I thought from the brief glimpse I'd caught, but I didn't need Jeannie's confirmation to tell me that he was the Brit I'd seen before. How he'd manage to surprise Pam when her Assistant should have warned her that he was nearby I didn't know, but that didn't matter. I was already running across those fifteen meters toward the small house into which the Brit had pulled Pam.

I reached the door without anyone else shooting me and paused just outside. The house was small and old, built of roughly hewn planks sealed with plaster, not much more than a box maybe four meters by three meters in length and width, the edge of the roof just above my head. *How close is he?* I asked Jeannie, knowing she could detect the Brit's implanted equipment if he was near enough.

*I can't sense any trace of him,* Jeannie assured me. *At our last encounter I spotted his presence at a range of six meters.*

That house was smaller than that. He must have pulled Pam inside and run. Relieved, I barreled through the door.

And found myself looking at the Brit standing over Pam, a dazed stun pistol in one hand pointed directly at me. "Don't move," he ordered. "Close the door."

I considered pointing out that I couldn't follow both orders, but decided that it wasn't worth playing games with a guy pointing a weapon at me and with Pam helpless. Nothing in the house seemed like it would be of much help. A single chair and a narrow bed against the side walls, and a Franklin stove, its open side facing me from where the black iron box sat within the old stone fireplace against the back wall, a tin pipe running straight up from it and through the roof. *Why didn't you detect that he was here?* I mentally yelled at Jeannie.

It's strange to hear an Assistant sounding shocked. *He's shut down his systems. His Assistant and his jump mech.*

*You should've been able to spot them in standby!*

*They're not in standby. They're completely shut down. I don't know of any way he could restart them in this now.*

All of this had taken perhaps two seconds. I stared at the Brit, wondering why anyone would permanently disable their ability to get back to their home now, then at his weapon. But at least that explained how he'd surprised Pam. Her Assistant wouldn't have spotted him either. *Can that pistol deliver a lethal charge?* I asked Jeannie as I closed the door, moving slowly and carefully.

*Insufficient data. Models sold were set to prohibit lethal charges, but were easily modified to allow a lethal nerve overload. That's why dazers were outlawed sixty years prior to our home now.*

The Brit looked way too much like someone who'd make that kind of modification, so I spoke in what I hoped was a calming voice. "I'm just here to help her. Neither of us wants anything to do with you."

"Lies!" His face twitched but the weapon remained fixed on my midsection. "I was about to finish her off when you showed up. You want to stop me!"

"Citizen, I don't even know what you want to do."

"More lies. As if you didn't know about this!" The Brit's free hand pulled open his uniform coat as I realized he looked a lot bulkier than the last time I'd encountered him. The reason for that became obvious as the coat pulled open to reveal a vest loaded with lots of blocks of something that looked dangerously familiar.

*What is that stuff?*

*Plastic explosive, Jeannie replied.*

"You're going to take out the Colonial militia?" I asked.

"Of course not," the Brit answered contemptuously. "If your little rebellion is to be crushed it must be met with overwhelming force and righteous retaliation. Boston doesn't need to be occupied, it needs to be flattened as an example to any Colonials who support rebellion." He gestured toward the outside with his free

hand. "A battle is one thing. It will arouse outrage in England, but not enough. No, that requires the belief that the Colonials murdered large numbers of our soldiers with a cowardly trick!"

His intent suddenly came clear. "You're going to mingle with the British regulars and then detonate that vest?" No wonder he'd been willing to shut down his systems. He didn't intend going home.

"Yes! Everyone will think the Colonials concealed some explosives in the road and detonated them without warning! Even Parliament will call for Boston to be dismantled brick by brick as an appropriate response to such a barbaric attack." He seemed enormously pleased with himself for a man who was about to commit suicide.

"But you're British, too. You'll be killing your own soldiers."

"So?" He made a dismissive gesture. "They agreed to die for the crown."

"And you're willing to do that, too?" I asked, not bothering to hide my revulsion at his attitude. "Then why isn't there a detonator wired into that vest?"

The Brit smiled unpleasantly and pulled a detonator out of one pocket. "No sense risking an accidental premature explosion. Once I finish you off, I'll set this in place, then go to join the British soldiers on their way here."

His hand with the stun pistol still remained steady on me, making a grab for it hopeless. But I knew he'd expect me to go for the dazer, not realizing that what I needed to get was the detonator.

I fainted toward the Brit's gun hand, then lunged back for the hand holding out the detonator. He reacted to protect the gun, turning that side away and firing at where I should have been. As the charge tore by close enough to numb my side under my arm, I closed one hand on the detonator and swung my other fist in a low hook. I couldn't waste a blow on the Brit's torso since it was well cushioned by all that plastic explosive, but his vest didn't go too far below his belt line. My fist hit his groin as the Brit tried to line up another shot at me. He squealed and his hands went limp, the detonator coming free in my left hand as I brought up my right and slapped the dazer away.

The Brit went to his knees and the dazer skidded into the corner. The detonator flipped up out of my grip and spun twice before I frantically caught it in midair and stepped back.

A lightening of the sky outside vaguely seen through a single window revealed that dawn was well under way. I heard commands being shouted in a way that called to mind disciplined military forces. The British regulars, deploying into line of battle at Lexington Green.

The Brit heard it, too. Delaying to attack Pam and then me had thrown off his schedule more than he realized, since he hadn't had his Assistant working to remind him of the time line. "Give me that detonator," he half threatened, half pleaded as he got his feet back under him.

"No. I don't particularly like people who are willing to murder other people on their own side in the name of some higher cause."

The Brit's eyes flicked from side to side, seeking some advantage.

I heard more shouts outside. It sounded like someone making demands and someone else answering, though I couldn't make out the words.

Pam groaned and raised her head, and my eyes and attention focused on her anxiously.

The Brit sprang. He barreled into me full force, grabbing for the detonator. I went backwards, his hand hit my wrist, and I lost my grip. The detonator flew backwards into the open front of the iron Franklin stove, hit the back wall of it, and did what detonators do when subjected to a shock like that.

The explosion wasn't very big, but the stove magnified the sound. The Brit stumbled to a halt and stared at the stove. "What have you done?" he shrieked.

"Saved some of your countrymen." The explosive vest completely covered his torso, so I stuck my finger against his neck and pumped the tranq crystal into him. He stiffened, then dropped limply. Tempted as I was to let him slam full force onto the floor, I have a policy of not letting high explosives slam into things if I can help it, so I caught the Brit and lowered him to the floor, vaguely aware of the sounds of more explosions echoing outside.

That's when I spotted Pam again. She'd gotten to her feet against one wall, her eyes on me and her expression shocked. "What did you do?" she gasped.

"Why is everybody asking me that?" The explosions somewhere outside were rising in crescendo. "What happened?"

Pam looked from me to the stove. "You're hearing the Colonial militia and

the British regulars exchanging fire on Lexington Green. The American Revolutionary War has started.”

No wonder she was upset. “And because of this guy you weren’t able to deploy your gear to help find who fired that first shot.”

Pam gave me a look like she doubted my sanity. “Are you kidding? You haven’t figured it out? You fired the first shot. You’re the shooter.”

“That’s ridiculous. I—” It hit me then, and I pivoted to look at the stove. The detonator had exploded inside it. The metal box had magnified the sound, much of which had vented into this room, but plenty had gone up the metal tube that formed the chimney. Metal tube. Explosion at one end. The noise on the other end would sound like a gunshot. “I don’t even carry a gun and I’m the shooter.”

Pam shook her head in amazement. “No wonder no one could localize the shot to any possible location! The noise vented upward through the chimney and got deflected to all sides by the rain baffle on top! And no one could identify the weapon because it was an anachronistic detonator ‘fired’ through a chimney ‘barrel.’ But why did you do it?”

“What do you mean why did I do it?” I demanded. “The Brit here was about to kill you. I had to stop that, which meant I had to stop him.”

“You started a war to save me?” Pam didn’t seem certain how she should feel about that. “Tom, that’s so very gallant. Also so very stupid, but gallant.”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!”

Pam came away from the wall, rubbing her forehead and grimacing. “So the shot that started the American Revolution was an accidental explosion caused because a time traveler here and now to document the American Revolution was trying to rescue another time traveler, who was here and now to find out who fired the shot, from a third time traveler who was here and now to change the events of the day but in the process made them happen the way they historically did. This is the sort of thing that makes people really upset with TIs, you know.”

“It’s not my fault causality is circular through time,” I grumbled, retrieving the Brit’s dazer. “If I caused the shot, how come nobody discovered me doing it before this?”

“Because even though you did it you hadn’t done it yet!”

“And I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t been following you!”

Pam stared at me again. “Which you wouldn’t have been if I hadn’t come here and now to see you.”

I was getting dizzy. “Which you wouldn’t have done if we weren’t going to meet in London about a hundred and thirty years from now. Which wouldn’t have happened unless other people had tried to alter the outcome of a war that was decided by the future United States. I’ve always known how complex it all is, time filled with countless causality wheels interacting and blending and interfering, but where the hell did this one start?”

“There isn’t any beginning and there isn’t any end. You know that. So did the ancients. That’s why the symbol for infinity grew out of the worm Ouroboros swallowing its own tail.” Pam sighed. “But my job here is a success. I’ve learned where the shot came from and why.”

“But no one knew that before you came here. Why don’t I tell anyone? Aside from embarrassment, I mean.”

Pam smiled. “I guess you’re not in your home now to tell anyone.”

“Why wouldn’t—? Oh. I guess this means I *have* to emigrate to your now.”

Her smile went away and her eyes narrowed dangerously. “*Have* to? Is that how you see it?”

From the way Pam was looking at me, if I didn’t think fast the first day of the American Revolution might see another casualty. I raised my hand to my head and feigned confusion. “Did I say something that didn’t make sense? That guy hit me pretty hard, and I’m still really rattled—”

“Your Assistant told my Assistant that you’re fine. No concussion.”

*Traitor*, I told Jeannie. “It’s probably something she can’t detect. I’m sure the medical tech in your now can handle it. I’m really happy to be going there to be with you. Did I mention that?”

“Uh huh. Sure.”

“Hey, I started a war because I love you! Doesn’t that count?”

“Next time just give me chocolate,” Pam advised. “What do we do with this

guy? Send him home?"

"We can't. He's shut down his jump mechanism."

"Yeah, we can," Pam announced. "Annie can transmit enough power to reactivate his power source, then his own power source can trigger his jump mech. Once Jeannie gets her upgrade in my now she'll be able to do that, too. I'll have Annie reset his jump so he comes out fifty years uptime from his home now. He'll have a real hard time explaining his presence there and trying to get back to his home now." Pam held still for a moment, then the Brit's body popped out of existence. "What was that he was wearing?"

"Explosive vest."

"Ugh. One of them. He's going to get a real unpleasant reception when I sent him." Pam looked toward the outside, alarm showing. "There's TIs all over the place out there and some of them are getting closer. Let's get the hell out of Dodge."

"Will you be there too?" I asked.

"Dodge City? Yeah, 1878."

"I'll be there in 1879!"

"Late! Just like a man. Now let's jump back to our own home nows before someone else we don't want to meet catches us here!"

But I waited until Pam vanished, then triggered my own jump.

\* \* \* \*

Which is how I found myself filling out the forms for emigration uptime, accompanied by the sponsor's affidavit from Pam, and saying good-bye to everyone I knew in what would soon be my former home now. The guys I knew all told me I was nuts to be leaving my home now for a girl, and the girls I knew all cried and told me what a great guy I was. They all chipped in a little to help pay for the jump in lieu of presents for a wedding that wouldn't happen for another century.

I didn't tell anyone I started the American Revolution by accident. That secret is safe for another century.

