

## **TIME SLIP EXCERPT**

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## Chapter 1

Aug 7 (01:15)

A simple pop, barely audible above the machine's clamorous roar, unceremoniously confirmed for the third time man's greatest scientific achievement: the creation of a doorway to another time. There was no celebratory pomp, no parade of reporters, not even a throng of scientists to witness this feat. There was only Dr. Ron, its creator, watching with the same detached wonderment he had had the first two times.

Just forty hours earlier, he had accidentally created a time slip. It was supposed to have been a simple day of testing, a day which began without his wife/assistant who was home, resting from a cold that wouldn't go away. But he hadn't been about to let this opportunity pass, after the mountains of red tape necessary to get the imprimatur from ERCOT and the university. With the dated waiver in hand to pull an abnormal amount of power from the grid on that day, and the next scheduled waiver over a month away, he had gone ahead and run the first test himself. The five-minute warmup routine ran as expected. What was completely unexpected was the vortex generated by the machine. At first, he was mesmerized by this spinning ethereal form, concentric circles of bluish light, like some round mystic throw rug suspended above and perpendicular to the floor. In the center of this was a muddy image of another laboratory, not too dissimilar from his; seeing it was like looking through a dirty window. Then, it had occurred to him that this might not be just a window for viewing some other place; it could be a doorway. Then it had closed.

He remembered his excitement as he had run to his side office and grabbed a prized Christmas gift from his grand-nephew: a remote-controlled drone and its controller. He had dashed back to the machine, as if it would disappear like the vortex had if he didn't keep an eye on it. The drone had a camera—maybe it would feed images remotely to his computer. He had added the electronic thermometer sensor from outside the lab window and about twenty minutes and a few test flights later, he was adept enough to try sending it through, if that proved possible.

The second time he had fired up the machine, the drone had already been airborne—like now. That time he had been nervous, unsure the anomaly could be recreated. Yet, the window had popped open and he had flown the drone into it. The drone almost immediately lurched up, as if it hit a headwind, and then crashed. He had eyed the remote and wondered, *Did I do that?* Ten seconds after opening, the doorway had closed on the dead drone and the other world it now occupied—but not before transmitting some data.

Then yesterday, his data had led him to believe it was a doorway to another time. He had planned this next test, anxious not only because this could confirm his theory, but also because this time he would be knowingly breaking the law for only the second time in his life (the first had been a parking violation at the U). It was merely a civil statute governing the use of power. He figured the risk was worth the reward: If he could prove this really was a way to create a controlled time slip, he would change the world.

Now, with the doorway open and the ten-second clock started, he didn't hesitate steering the drone toward the opening. This time it was no Radio Shack toy: based on a military design now available for commercial and research operations, this drone was fitted with multiple sensors, cameras, and top of the line electronics—hardened against electromagnetic pulses, equipped with miniaturized radio equipment and so much more than he probably needed, which explained the ridiculously high price tag. Thankfully, he had almost limitless funds. Besides, what was a few dollars when you were changing the world?

He glanced at the computer from his periphery to confirm that all the sensors were transmitting data. Everything was a go. He looked back up and his heart stopped.

It was him. He was looking at himself on the other side of the doorway. His other self had just pulled a slat from a boarded-up window. He watched himself look outside. Then his other self spun around and stared directly at him, seemingly just as startled as he was. There was no doubt he was looking at his own image. He practically leapt, startled, certainly, from the spine-tingling paradox but also from the realization that he hadn't been paying attention to the drone. Then the window closed, and he was staring at the area where the doorway had been—and a beat-up hundred-thousand-dollar drone.

He was now certain of two facts, and he didn't need the drone to confirm them: The window he created was definitely a time slip to an undetermined future, and he was going to travel through it.

What he didn't know was why.

## Chapter 2

Aug 7 (09:10)

"I'm afraid it's inoperable glioblastoma multiforme, a nasty form of brain cancer," Dr. Peter Valdez said over his spectacles. His cheeks were rosy, his eyes puffy and bloodshot. He pressed his palms together under his desk and wished he were anywhere but here.

"Is there nothing we can do?" Dr. Ron pleaded; his eyes were dams about to burst.

Valdez hesitated. "Chemo is an option, but that would only delay the inevitable, and she'd be sick from the chemo." He paused before continuing, choking back his emotions. "I'm sorry, but the only potential treatment for this type of cancer is five to ten years away, and Betsy has only a few months."

"What happens in five to ten years?" Ron asked, detached, only half listening now. His shoulders slumped, body slouched in his chair.

Valdez thought about what he wanted to say, making sure he said it correctly the first time. "There is a company called Cancer Bio-Systems that has come up with a miraculous drug combination that could cure your wife's form of cancer. However, it is at least a year or two from human trials and then another three to five years before the FDA could possibly approve it for general release to the public. This is the only treatment with any potential on the horizon. The damnable thing is they may have this thing licked, based on what I hear from a friend who is on their research team. Only, Betsy doesn't have that long." Now he was angry. "Dammit, Ron, if there was any way I could think of to beg, borrow, or steal this drug for Betsy or keep her alive long enough till we knew, I would. But I've thought this through every which way till Sunday, and I just don't have an alternative."

Ron knew this was Pete's plain way of telling him the way it was. It wasn't because they were related—he was just as direct with all of his patients. Every word that came out of his mouth was meant exactly as it was said, but with a Texas regionalism thrown in for color. At this time though, he wasn't sure if he longed for a physician who beat around the bush, afraid to spell out what everyone knew. No, Pete was exactly what they needed.

Then Ron sat straight up as if he had received a jolt of electricity. Now alert, he asked very slowly, "Are you sure about this company, that is, as sure as you can be?"

"I would stake my reputation on it."

"You were a research scientist for years before you turned to private practice, right?"

"You know this to be true." Pete's brows furrowed, his eyes curiously examining his friend of thirty-three years.

"Think about this before you answer, because I am deadly serious when I ask it..."

"I'm listening." He stared at Monty sternly.

"If you knew what this company was using, and if I gave you the okay to move forward with administering these ingredients even though it would be against the law because it was not fully tested, would you administer this to my wife?"

"Since you know the answer to this most obvious question as well, I'm wondering why you are even asking?"

"I'm asking, because I want to be sure of your answer."

Pete considered. "Since you are asking me and you know my answer, I can only assume that you are planning something irrational and risky," he said, thinking his brother-in-law might try to steal it.

It was Ron's turn to scowl now. "Since when have I done anything that anyone would qualify as irrational?"

"That's what scares the hell out of me."

"So answer the question."

"Okay, fine. You know I woul--will do whatever it takes to save your wife, my sister, from the ravages of this disease."

"Great, so do what you can to keep her alive and strong enough for the next twelve months or so. And give me all the details of this company."

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About ten minutes later, Betsy stepped through the door of Dr. Valdez's reception area. Ron looked up from his palms and welcomed her with a smile. He acted as if he just arrived, too, as if Pete and he hadn't already worked out all the details of the consultation that was about to follow.

"The doctor will see you now," said the receptionist.

Betsy squeezed his hand hard, and he squeezed back. "It will be all right, Bets, I promise."