

NaPIWriMo 2009

by Ian Johnston

CAST:

NIGEL - a manager at a software company
JEANETTE - a “dumb blonde”
WAITER
BUM
BEAT COP
GEARHEAD - a miscreant
BOBBY - a miscreant
DAZ - a miscreant
THAD - a time traveler - Thaddeus Gregson
PROFESSOR - James Moriarty - a genius from the late 1800s
AGENT 147 - a time regulations enforcer
AGENT 233 - a time regulations enforcer
MEDIC 1
MEDIC 2
LAWYER - Meg, a lawyer in the year 2173
JUDGE - McCarthy
PROSECUTOR - John, a lawyer
STENY - an expert in temporal dynamics

Note regarding years and times: the 1880 date should remain the same, no matter when the production is staged (unless produced significantly before 2009, of course). The “modern” date, recorded here as 2010, should be changed to whatever the current year is. The time interval (“130 years”) should be adjusted to suit, although up to five years’ slop is fine for the sake of an easy-to-say number. The far future date could be adjusted: the intention was merely to find a date that was really far in the future, such that easy predictions about that time are impossible.

SCENE

The stage is set as a fine restaurant, centered on an elegant table for two. NIGEL and JEANETTE sit at the table. NIGEL is wearing a shirt and tie, with his jacket draped over the back of his chair. JEANETTE is wearing a little black dress. Lightweight classical music plays in the background, along with the subdued murmur of other diners, the clink of silverware against dishes, etc.

NIGEL and JEANETTE have already eaten, and napkins and wine glasses are all that remain on the table.

NIGEL

And then, would you believe it, he pulled out the very photo album he’d been complaining about!

NIGEL and JEANETTE both burst out laughing.

JEANETTE

I can’t believe that! How could he act so weird?

NIGEL

I know, it's the strangest thing. He was definitely a weird uncle, that's for sure. *[Pause]* Man, that was a good dinner. I didn't even know this place existed. Thanks for suggesting it.

JEANETTE

Oh yeah, I love to come here, the food is delicious, and the environment is just divine.

NIGEL gets his wallet out of his jacket pocket, pulls out a credit card, and waves it in the air to get a waiter's attention.

A WAITER appears, takes the card, and walks quickly off.

NIGEL

What do you say we get out of here? Can I interest you in some after dinner coffee, or a nightcap, back at my place?

JEANETTE

[She considers a moment before answering] Sure, that'd be nice. I've had a good time tonight, Nigel.

NIGEL

Me too. *[They lock gazes across the table. NIGEL breaks first]* Hey, look, I'll be right back, ok?

JEANETTE

Sure.

NIGEL gets up and exits the stage in search of the bathroom.

The scene is static for a few beats. The WAITER returns with a bill folder and places it in front of NIGEL's spot at the table. JEANETTE eyes it, then, glancing around furtively, quickly opens the bill folder and grabs the card. She stands, and looking back over her shoulder to where NIGEL exited, snags his coat in one quick motion and walks briskly out to exit in a different direction.

Moments later, NIGEL returns, to stand looking at the table, dumbfounded. He looks around at other tables to see if he came back to the wrong one.

NIGEL

Hey! Where... *[He spots the missing jacket]* Oh come on!

Blackout

SCENE

A city street at night. Sound of cars roaring by occasionally. NIGEL wanders, obviously cold and unhappy. He has an overcoat that was in the coat check at the restaurant, but it looks strange without the jacket underneath it. He comes across a BUM.

BUM

Hey buddy, spare a quarter? Maybe a beer? *[Laughs]*

NIGEL stops and stares at the BUM, as if he can't really see him.

BUM

Hey, buddy, you alright? *[Pause]* Yo, buddy!

NIGEL

[Snapping out of it] Oh, uh. *[He goes into his pocket for his wallet, realizes it's not there.]* No, sorry...

NIGEL abruptly sits down next to the BUM, who looks alarmed at this unusual behavior.

BUM

Hey, woah there. You can't sit here.

NIGEL

[Distractedly] Huh? Why not?

There is a pause as the BUM considers this question, which has never occurred to him before.

BUM

Well, uh, because this is my spot. You wanna beg, you go somewhere else. Or, you know, if you wanna buy me out, you can have this spot.

NIGEL looks over at the BUM, engaged for the first time since the restaurant.

NIGEL

Buy you out? What the hell are you talking about?

BUM

Yeah, buy me out. All business-like. You can take this spot if you give me... *[Pauses, considering]* Twenty bucks. That's about what I'd make tonight. Make it worth my while.

NIGEL

Are you kidding!? I'm not going to give you twenty bucks to sit here!

BUM

Hey, calm down. *[He looks nervously around]* It's cool, just a thought. No need to shout.

A BEAT COP enters and stops in front of the pair.

BEAT COP

Well well, Donnegan, who's your new friend?

BUM

[Nervously] Nobody, Johnson, nobody. He's just some guy.

BEAT COP

He don't look like nobody. He looks like somebody. And you know, when I see you talkin' to somebodies, it kinda makes me unhappy. *[Looking suddenly at NIGEL. His manner is menacing and aggressive.]* Good evening *sir*, is there something I can help you with?

NIGEL

Uh, uh, uh. No. No, I mean, I was just walking past, when this guy...

BEAT COP

That's very fascinating, *sir*. Now that I have assured myself that this bum *[Little kick toward the BUM]* wasn't causing you any trouble, I'm sure you'll be wanting to move along. Isn't that right?

NIGEL stands, and looks for a moment between the BUM and the BEAT COP.

NIGEL

No, of course, that's right. Sorry officer.

NIGEL walks off hurriedly, glancing over his shoulder as he exits.

Blackout

SCENE

Lights up on three miscreants in various states of repose. They are bored and waiting for something to happen, but none of them has the energy to make any good suggestions. It's a deserted city street, a lone streetlight providing the only illumination.

BOBBY

C'mon Gearhead, we gotta find something to do.

GEARHEAD

Shit, you got me, man. I don't got enough cash to get drunk, and the last time I seen a girl worth fuckin' was weeks ago.

DAZ

That's not what my sister said...

GEARHEAD

[Sitting up, agitated] You shut up Daz, or that's gonna be the last thing you say...

They are cut off when NIGEL enters the scene, still wandering and disconsolate. The three get up and swagger menacingly toward him, and it takes NIGEL a moment to realize that he's in danger.

BOBBY

Hello, hello, hello. What have we here? A bit outside your normal neighborhood, sir?

NIGEL looks at BOBBY, but doesn't say anything.

BOBBY

Nothin' to say? Come now, sir, surely you can be polite, and answer my question?

GEARHEAD and DAZ grin and nudge each other, knowing things are about to get interesting.

Without saying a word, but with growing fear showing on his face, NIGEL suddenly turns and runs off. The miscreants give a shout and follow him after a moment of surprise.

Blackout. SFX of NIGEL running and being chased, with calls of "Stop him!" and "Get him!" and the like. This lasts for a few seconds until we hear NIGEL stop, and three sets of footsteps run by. The sound of a door opening and closing.

SCENE

Lights up on a desolate basement room, with a bare bulb providing the majority of the illumination.

In the center of the room is an ornate, steampunk-y device, a time machine a la HG Wells. THAD, a man in Victorian gentlemen's dress, is standing over it with a couple of parts in his hand, scratching his head. NIGEL stands off to one side, having just come in the door.

NIGEL

What the hell is this?

THAD looks up, surprised.

THAD

Oh! Goodness but you startled me! *[Pause]* I say old chap, what year is it?

NIGEL

You're kidding, right?

THAD

No, frightfully sorry. I... Could you just tell me the year?

NIGEL

[With a look on his face like he might be going crazy] Two thousand ten.

THAD

[Looking surprised] Really! That's... *[He looks back at the machine, and the parts in his hand]* I say, I feel quite ridiculous asking this, but you don't happen to know anything about time machines, do you?

NIGEL stands silent, speechless. Finally he collects himself.

NIGEL

You're kidding, right? A time machine? Come on. Those don't exist.

THAD

[Laughing nervously] Of course, most people believe that. Modern science... *[He catches himself]* Well, that is, *my* modern science holds time machines to be impossible. Naturally, I had rather hoped that by jumping forward one hundred thirty years, I would find that time machines were commonplace, and the only reason we have never heard of them was due to a strict ethical code on the part of future man.

NIGEL

[Scoffing and laughing derisively] You're kidding, right? Ethical code? Future man? Knock it off. I mean, nice clothes and all, and I love your prop time machine, but no way you're a time traveler from 150 years ago.

THAD

I assure you, I am, although I admit that I can offer only myself and this machine as proof of that fact. Except... *[He rummages in his pockets and pulls out a coin]* Here. Kindly examine that.

NIGEL

[Taking the coin] A coin, big deal.

THAD points to a spot on the coin.

THAD

What is the date imprinted there?

NIGEL holds the coin close to his face and examines it more closely.

NIGEL

So? 1879. You could have gotten this off the Internet, no problem. Ebay's probably got a half-dozen available right now. What is that, from England?

THAD

[Stiffly, taking the coin back] That is a British sixpence piece, yes.

NIGEL

Hey, don't get so offended. It's a nice coin, but it doesn't prove anything.

THAD

Well, look, it's immaterial whether you believe me. What is of the utmost importance is that I need to return to my time, to 1880. In order to do that, I need to repair this machine here.

NIGEL

[Interested despite himself] What's wrong with it? *[Looking around]* Anyway, how'd you get it in here? No way you fit it through that door.

THAD

[Increasingly exasperated] I don't know what's wrong with it. All I know is that it worked to get me here, and once I was here, it died. *[Turning his attention back to the machine]* The galvanic jars appear to be intact, and I can't imagine what else might have gone wrong with it.

NIGEL

[Now playing along] How does it work?

THAD looks around at him, plainly annoyed.

THAD

I don't know, exactly.

NIGEL

[Now amused] You don't know? You traveled 130 years into the future, and you don't know how you did it?

THAD

No. Look. I didn't come here to be japed at by addle-pated jackdaws such as yourself. It's not my machine, or rather, I didn't build it.

NIGEL

Oh, so you stole it, then?

THAD

What!?! No, I didn't steal it, don't be daft, man! The gentleman who built this machine is nearing 70 years of age, and was far too frail to test it himself. I am his assistant. *[Now recalling with an effort what he really wants]* Sir, if you cannot provide me with any assistance, then I must bid you good day.

NIGEL

If I help you fix it, can I go *[Air quotes]* "time traveling" with you?

THAD considers for a moment.

THAD

I don't know if it would hold the two of us. In any case, why would you want to leave your life here?

NIGEL

Why did you want to leave your life there, then?

THAD

I didn't leave my life, I was simply testing out the device. We'd tested it as extensively as possible without actually traveling along the temporal plane. For all I know, setting it for 130 years was too much of a strain. I should have chosen a smaller value.

There is a lull, as THAD fiddles ineffectually with the machine. NIGEL watches him, trying to decide if he's for real, or if this is all an elaborate hoax. THAD does something that breaks the machine further, sets down the pieces with exaggerated care, and then throws up his hands in frustration.

THAD

Confound it! How am I supposed to fix your machine if you won't tell me how it works, Professor! *[Suddenly defeated, he turns to NIGEL]* Sir, if it's not imposing too much, I don't suppose you could help me procure some sustenance, could you? I doubt very much that what small money I have on my person would work in...?

NIGEL

Twenty ten. New York. How'd you get to New York, anyway? You sound like you're from England.

THAD

The Earth shifts through time as you surely know, it's not stationary, both in its rotation, and in its orbit about the Sun. One of the things Professor Moriarty spent a great deal of time on was geographical relationships encoded into the aetheric fluid. It would appear he got it wrong. It's amazing to consider I landed anywhere near the ground, much less in a major city. I take it New York still is a major city?

NIGEL

Yeah, New York's still big. One of the biggest.

THAD

Well, that's some small comfort. Perhaps there's a way to locate someone who knows something of the Professor's work. Is there a university nearby, with a large library?

NIGEL

I can do you one better, let's just look it up on Wikipedia. *[He reaches for his phone, then remembers that it's gone with his jacket and his wallet]* Fuck!

THAD

Wick-a-what? And what's the matter?

NIGEL sits heavily on the ground, and puts his head in his hands.

NIGEL

That bitch took my iPhone. *[He looks up at THAD to see his blank expression]* I have a device that... Well, anyway, you wouldn't believe me, but it got stolen, so I can't help you. She took my wallet too, so even if I wanted to feed a crazy person, you'd be out of luck.

THAD

Oh, I see. What does it cost to use a library in twenty ten?

NIGEL

No... No, it's... Did you really travel in time?

Lights fade out

SCENE

Lights up on a Victorian era mad scientist's lab. PROFESSOR MORIARTY works on something intricate and fiddly at a bench.

THAD voiceover

By my lights, the year is 1880. My employer, Professor James Moriarty, is an eminent scientist, working with aetheric fluids and fluxes. I can tell you, it's heady stuff, and I don't properly understand half of what he does... Well, what he did, I suppose.

Professor Moriarty has been working on a time-travel device for nearly a decade now—if you'll excuse me, I'll not keep correcting my tenses for 2010—making usually small strides at a time, but gradually, he has built up this device.

The time machine, whole and undamaged, sits prominently in the lab.

THAD voiceover

He has finally perfected his device, after having surprised himself by sending a mouse 5 minutes into the past—I can tell you, he toyed with the idea of not sending it back into the past once it arrived, but decided the chances of paradoxical calamity would be too great—and a variety of other experiments. He was convinced that it would work. After nearly losing an arm when he sent the device forward a few minutes in time, we determined that it was ready for its first full test.

THAD enters the scene, dressed much as he was in the present, although perhaps neater and more composed.

MORIARTY

Now, Thaddeus, I've made a list here of preparations we shall need to make before the first manned transit of the temporal plane. [*He hands over a list*] As you can see, I've placed food, firearms, and a few choice replacement parts on the list, along with suitable blankets, mackintoshes, and warm woolens should our destination prove inhospitable.

THAD

Professor, you're not proposing to go on this trip yourself, are you?

MORIARTY

Well... I was considering it, lad. Just imagine, we could actually establish the true course of events around Jesus' life. We could see how humanity turns out in a hundred or a thousand years. We could confer with the greatest scientific minds of all time. Imagine being able to discuss planetary motion with Galileo! Or Sir Isaac Newton! To be present at the foundation of the Royal Society!

THAD

You know that Dr. Martin said you were to have no nervous excitement, Professor. Your health depends upon rest. I'm quite sure that the good doctor would consider traveling upon the aether to be quite contrary to his instructions.

MORIARTY

Oh, fie upon the doctor. What does that busybody understand of science? He knows not of what he speaks; his best use is in the prescription of morphia and similar restoratives. Every physician I've ever met is insufferable, and I'm shocked at you that you give them such credence, my boy.

THAD

[Soothingly] Of course, Professor, I apologize for raising the point. I still think it might be wise for me to perform the first manned test of your device, though. Think of the loss to science—to mankind—if you should injure or kill yourself!

MORIARTY

True enough, lad, true enough. Well, let's drink a toast to my creation. *[Pouring brandy, toasting]* Tomorrow we can set about gathering the supplies for the first test.

Lights change to indicate the passage of time. THAD and MORIARTY drink and toast repeatedly.

THAD voiceover

Drink we did. The Professor has ever been a man of strong sentiments, and that night saw us both imbibe more than our fair share. So much so, in fact, that by the time the evening had passed, and the Professor had fallen asleep, it seemed to me a dashed fine idea to give the device a try. Of course, in my inebriated state, my thoughts were far from clear, and I pulled the lever wearing only my normal clothes, with none of the precautionary items from Professor Moriarty's list.

Lights return to flashback-normal.

THAD clambers into the machine, clearly drunk, and after a moment fiddling with knobs and setting the dials for over 100 years in the future, he decisively pulls a large lever.

Lights go crazy followed by blackout to indicate the successful triggering of the time machine. The time machine itself might light up as well, possibly issuing forth fog or throwing sparks. SFX to complete the picture.

SCENE

Back in the present day. THAD and NIGEL are sitting in the room, contemplating the time machine.

NIGEL

How did it break, then?

THAD

I suspect it was the hard landing, but I can't say for sure. The process of traveling along the temporal plane is extremely unpleasant. It only took a few seconds according to my objective sense of time, but the experience of it seemed to take a great deal of time indeed. By the time I understood what was happening, I was rolling out of the machine in this room. I believe I appeared several feet above the floor.

NIGEL

Wow. You realize how completely impossible this all sounds, right? No one's going to believe me if I tell them about this.

THAD

I assure you, it's all quite true. I haven't the imagination to invent such things. I wish I could invent the solution to my broken pieces, and travel back to 1880. I shudder to think how the world has changed. Everyone I knew is dead, now, unless medicine has improved greatly since my time.

NIGEL laughs derisively.

NIGEL

Nah, well, I mean, yeah, things have improved, but it's not like we're all living to a hundred and twenty or anything. Most people still live to 80 or 90 at the most. Your professor might have been in better health. I guess we're doing better than constant rest and morphia. What is morphia, anyway, is that like morphine or something?

THAD

Morphia is a distillation of the essence of the opium poppy. Morphine certainly sounds similar.

NIGEL

Yeah, that sounds like the same thing. Not really my scene, but I guess I've got some friends who smoke pot.

THAD looks confused.

NIGEL

Oh, pot is marijuana. Um, I think it used to be called hemp.

THAD

Ah, hemp. We make ropes out of hemp. Made. We made ropes out of hemp. But I'm sure that's still the case now, is it not?

NIGEL

I don't think so. I mean, I don't really know, I'm not an expert on rope or anything. I think rope is mostly made out of nylon and stuff now.

THAD

Nylon?

NIGEL

Ah, jeez. You're askin' the wrong guy. You want to know about how to manage a group of software geeks, I'm your man. Beyond that, I know how to play volleyball, mix a good martini, and watch football. *[Getting introspective]* And really, I thought I knew where my life was going, but tonight kinda has me wondering about that. I mean, one moment I'm having dinner with a beautiful girl, the next I'm out on my ass, miles from home with no money, no phone, and no friends. *[Coming back to himself]* Present company excepted, I'm sure.

THAD

Quite. I'm afraid you rather lost me there. Are you in the soft goods trade? Linens? Cotton?

NIGEL

Christ, sorry. No, um, let's see. You know about, uh, Babbage? What was his first name? I think he was around your time. Anyway, he made this fancy adding machine for doing math really fast. You know anything about him?

THAD

You mean Charles Babbage? He was working with an engine for doing computations, was he not? He produced tables of logarithms which are still—were still—used by mathematicians.

NIGEL

Right, that guy. So, he made the first computer. Now, you could pretty much say that computers run the world, but they're not mechanical like Babbage made, they're... Christ, I don't know how to explain it. They're electrical I guess, anyway, software is what tells the computer how to behave, how to do a job. It's like a set of instructions. I manage people who write software. Nothing to do with linens.

THAD

[Excited] If you understand something so complex as that, surely the repair of a comparatively simple mechanical device can't be beyond you! Surely my time machine is something that you could easily understand—

NIGEL

I told you, I don't know how to fix anything like that. I don't really get software, I just get people. I manage the guys who write the software, I'm not a techie myself. Maybe one of my guys could help you out, I think John tinkers with motorcycles or something in his spare time, but... Like I said, I'm miles from home, without any money or ID or anything. At least I still got my keys, so if I can get myself home, I'll be ok...

THAD

What transportation options are there now? Can one still hire a carriage?

NIGEL

Well, kinda. They're called taxis, and that'd be great if I had any money. But I don't, and it's not a good long-term survival strategy, to piss off a taxi driver.

THAD

Can you not walk the distance back to your dwelling? Are there dangers to walking in twenty ten?

NIGEL

Jeez, walk 8 miles? I think that's how far it is. I guess I could do it, but it's not like I'm in great shape. Maybe you walked a lot where you come from, but I get tired going up the stairs. I didn't used to, of course, but software isn't an industry where you get a lot of exercise, you know?

THAD

Well, we seem to be at an impasse here. Although I am enjoying our conversation, I can't help feeling that some food and rest would suit me extremely well. If I walk with you back to your residence, could I prevail upon your hospitality to such an extent?

NIGEL

Yeah, I guess so. Hell, it's been a crazy night so far, crazy bitch stole my jacket, crazy people tried to mug me, crazy homeless guy tried to scam me, why not make it an even dozen with a crazy guy who thinks he's a time traveler? Let's go.

Blackout as THAD and NIGEL exit.

SCENE

Lights up on NIGEL's bachelor pad. It's nicely appointed, and shows some taste, but it's definitely still a bachelor pad. Pizza boxes are piled in one corner, and a bin in the corner is full of empty beer cans.

NIGEL and THAD enter after the sound of unlocking deadbolts. NIGEL is bright red and winded from the long walk. THAD is largely as he was before.

NIGEL

Well, here it is. My place. Home sweet home.

NIGEL has thrown off his coat, and now sits heavily on a chair, tugging at his tie.

THAD

I don't rightly know what I had expected, but flats don't seem dramatically different from my time. But those horseless carriages... cars, I mean! And the electrical lights! Amazing!

NIGEL

Yeah, it's pretty cool. Where'd you live? London?

THAD

Yes, London. I expect it's changed quite a bit since my time.

NIGEL

Couldn't tell you. Probably. Big Ben's still there, I know that.

THAD

[Growing morose] Yes, I expect it is. I suppose my flat in Gore Street is still there as well. I wonder how my wife took my disappearance. I wonder how the Professor explained it. A hundred and thirty years. All gone now.

NIGEL gets up to console the now nearly weeping THAD, but can't figure out how. He goes for the liquor cabinet instead.

NIGEL

Can I get you a drink?

THAD

Oh, yes, brandy would be lovely, thank you.

NIGEL

Ah crap, sorry. I don't have any brandy. The closest I have is scotch, I guess.

THAD

Scotch would be an acceptable substitute, thank you.

NIGEL pours a drink and hands it to THAD, who sips it gently.

NIGEL

Say, I've got a computer here, we could look up your professor, see if maybe there's any information out there that could help you.

THAD

[Looking around] I thought we were alone. Is he in another room?

NIGEL

What?

THAD

Your computer. Is he in another room?

NIGEL holds up a laptop.

NIGEL

No, it's right here. What are you talking about?

THAD

Oh, I see. A computer, as I know the term, is a man who sits at a desk with a pencil and does sums. It plainly means something else, now.

NIGEL

Yeah, it means this thing. A thinking machine, sort of. Like that Babbage stuff we were talking about before.

NIGEL types on the keyboard for a few seconds, then turns the screen to THAD.

NIGEL

To move the text up and down, press these buttons. We'll move on to the mouse—that's another device, not an actual living rodent—in a minute. Read this, see if it looks interesting to you.

THAD is plainly fascinated once he gets a look at the screen, holding the laptop at different angles as if looking for the hidden machinery. He finally settles down enough to look at the screen and read the text that's on it: a Wikipedia page. He reads for a minute, then points to the screen.

THAD

Goodness, look at this? Is it right? Is this information correct?

NIGEL

I dunno. It's Wikipedia, it might be right, or it might be full of crackpots. What are you talking about?

THAD

It says here that Professor Moriarty was imprisoned for my murder! He was working on a time machine, but no one believed it could work, and when I disappeared, he was sent to prison, where he died two years later! Oh, this is unthinkable! I can't have caused Professor Moriarty so much pain! I must return! We simply must find a way of getting the time machine functional again so that I can go and clear the Professor's name!

NIGEL

Woah there, calm down. If you can time travel, then it doesn't matter how much time we take here, right? If we get your thing fixed in 20 years, you could still drop back to the spot a moment after you left, right?

THAD

Well, yes, of course you're right, but this is just terrible! I really must return as quickly as possible.

NIGEL has taken the computer back, and is looking something else up.

NIGEL

Hah, look here! Someone posted a schematic of your time machine! Isn't this it?

THAD

Yes! Yes, that's it! But this is astounding! How did all this information fit into this tiny box?

NIGEL

That's a really really complicated question to answer, and I don't possibly have the energy to do that right now. But it does, and if this is the thing, then does this have the information you need to fix it?

THAD

I don't know, let me examine it. The plans are so small, is that how they fit in here?

NIGEL

Here. *[Pressing a button]* Now they're bigger, but you have to scroll around to see them. Use those buttons there, like before, but now these ones will do side-to-side.

THAD examines the screen for a minute, pressing buttons to scroll around on the page.

THAD

Well... These plans are incomplete. I'm quite certain Professor Moriarty had annotated plans with dimensions and proper labels, and these are bereft of anything save for the physical layout. Yet you found them so quickly! Who knows what may be found with but a trice more searching! *[Thinks for a moment]* Yet you know nothing of a functional time machine now, which means that it was never successfully tested, or rather that no one knows it was successfully tested... Tell me... You know, in all this time, I've never known your name! My name is Thaddeus Gregson. Please call me Thad.

NIGEL

Oh! Right, I'm Nigel Kaminski, nice to meet you.

They shake hands.

THAD

So, tell me Nigel, can we see if your device contains other copies of the plans, perhaps with more details? Can we take your computer machine back to the time machine, so that I may consult the plans there?

NIGEL

Well, it doesn't actually contain... Uh, yeah. Lemme take a look and see what I can find. *[Typing]* Moriarty. Time. Machine. Plans. Huh. Well, there are a few more hits here, do any of these look promising to you?

THAD

I'm not honestly sure what you're showing me right now.

NIGEL

Well, these are titles, and...

Doorbell ring

NIGEL looks at his watch, then at the door.

NIGEL

Who the hell is that at this hour?

NIGEL walks over to the door and opens it. JEANETTE is standing outside the door, with NIGEL's jacket draped over her arm. NIGEL snatches the jacket from her angrily.

NIGEL

What the fuck are you doing here?

JEANETTE

I came to apologize, and return your stuff. I'm sorry. Things were going so well, and then, I don't know what came over me. I'm... I'm going to counselling... I mean, I'm seeing a shrink about it. The stealing. I've... been doing it my whole life. I'm sorry, you must hate me now.

NIGEL is speechless, and stands staring at JEANETTE for too long, then checks to see that his wallet and cell phone are both in the jacket where they're supposed to be.

JEANETTE

Look, I'm really sorry. I really am. I don't know what else to say. *[Beat]* I can see you're busy, I'll just go.

NIGEL

No, just... *[Confused]* Don't go away, just come in and sit down. My life is way too weird at the moment.

JEANETTE

Ok.

NIGEL

Uh, Chad?

THAD

Thad.

NIGEL

Right, Thad. This is Jeanette, you have her to thank for meeting me, I guess. I need to talk to her for a minute, can you amuse yourself there for a little bit?

THAD

Indeed, perhaps I can gather something from one of these other plans – how do you make them large?

NIGEL fiddles with the computer while explaining.

NIGEL

If you move your finger on this part here, it moves the cursor—that's the arrow that's moving, there. If you press the button here, it selects... Anyway, put the arrow over the thing you want to look at and press this button. That will usually do it.

NIGEL pulls JEANETTE off to one side while THAD plays with the computer, producing an array of error noises.

NIGEL

Ok, cool, thanks for returning my jacket and stuff. I totally appreciate it. But what the hell?

JEANETTE

It's hard to explain. I have a disease called kleptomania, it's where I compulsively steal things. Usually it's little things, and sometimes I can put them back before anybody notices. But sometimes it's bigger things, and it's gotten me in trouble more than once. But I can't help it! It'd be like ignoring when you have to pee. Eventually you have to give in or you're gonna burst!

NIGEL

Ok, so, Jeanette, I was wrong, I can't really deal with this right now. Can we talk about this later? My life has seriously gone off the rails here, and I don't even know if I'm going to be here tomorrow.

JEANETTE

Oh my god! It's not worth killing yourself over!

NIGEL

No, Jeanette... Just, look. I'm not gonna kill myself. I'm just... Do you think time travel exists?

JEANETTE

Are you being serious?

NIGEL

Yes, just assume for a moment I'm being serious.

JEANETTE

Well... If time travel existed and we didn't know about it, it would be impossible to say if it existed or not, right? And I've never heard of it, but I don't know much about science, so maybe it does and I've just never heard, right?

NIGEL

No, no one's ever claimed to really invent time travel. But, I'm just asking... Never mind, it was a silly question.

JEANETTE

Well, ok. I mean, I don't know about time travel, but are you mad at me?

NIGEL

No, not really. No. I just... Let's talk about this later, ok?

JEANETTE

Ok. I'll think about time travel too, although if you went back in time to stop me from taking your jacket—

NIGEL

No, that's not why I'm asking. Never mind about time travel. I'll talk to you later, ok?

JEANETTE

Ok, Nigel. I'll talk to you tomorrow. I'm really sorry again.

NIGEL

It's not a big deal. Good night.

NIGEL closes the door on JEANETTE before she can say anything else.

NIGEL leans against the door for a moment, thinking. THAD has been tactfully waiting to say something this entire time.

THAD

I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Kaminski, but I can't imagine what has happened to your device, here.

THAD holds up the laptop, the screen of which is now dark.

NIGEL

Well... Oh, it does this when you leave it alone for too long, it's not broken. Any progress on your search?

THAD

I believe so. This description here lists some of the information I need. Have you a pencil and a scrap of paper? I believe that I should be able to purchase some of these items. We'll need a chandler, a chemist, and a shop that sells mechanical items, such as a hardgoods merchant.

NIGEL looks blankly at THAD.

THAD

Well, a chandler is a shop which sells items for boats and ships. New York is upon a river, is it not? There must be a chandler somewhere nearby. A chemist is someone who sells drugs and medicines. I trust you know what "mechanical" means?

NIGEL

Ok, right. Look, Thad, could we maybe do this in the morning? It's past 1 AM, and I'm beat. You can sleep on the sofa there if you want, I've got some spare blankets.

THAD

[Yawning mightily] Goodness, you're right, I have absolutely no idea how long I've been awake at this point. Empirical data suggests more than 130 years! *[Dry chuckle]* But it does feel as though I've been active for considerably longer than a normal day. Things should look clearer in the morning.

Lights fade out as the two arrange THAD's sleeping place on the sofa.

SCENE

Lights up on NIGEL's apartment, morning light streaming through a window.

THAD is asleep on the sofa, with a Star Wars blanket (or similarly geeky kid's blanket) over him. He awakes with a start and sits up. He looks around himself in wonder, then realized where he is, and a look of pained sadness crosses his face.

NIGEL walks in the room, stretching and yawning, clearly fresh out of bed. He's wearing pyjamas, and starts coffee brewing before he's even aware of THAD.

NIGEL

Jesus! Oh, right. Good morning... It was Thad, right?

THAD

Indeed it is, Mr. Kaminski.

NIGEL

Just call me Nigel, ok? In 2010 New York, we don't call people Mr. Something unless they're a business partner or something. Once you've slept on somebody's couch, first names are ok.

THAD

Oh, very well, Mr... Nigel. *[Thrilled at the newness of calling someone by their first name]* Could I beg your assistance today, for the purpose of acquiring my parts for the time machine, Mr... Nigel?

NIGEL

Yeah, I guess so. It's Saturday, so I dunno what's gonna be open or not, you know? Where did you need to go again?

THAD

I believe a chandler, a chemist, and a hardgoods store should answer my needs.

NIGEL

Ok. *[Thinks for a moment]* What do you expect to get at these places, anyway?

THAD

Oh, let's see. I will require a number of fittings of brass, a length of rope, carboxylic acid, a quarter pound of #8 iron screws (I trust you have a screwdriver), a hand-drill, some copper round stock, and a length of quartz rod. I may also require a hand saw, but we shall have to see about that once we're back at the machine.

NIGEL

Quartz rod? Where are you expecting to get quartz rod?

THAD

Oh dear, is that an unusual thing in this era? It was uncommon, but not impossible to find, in my time, I would have expected it at... Well, I suppose you would call it a scientific supply shop. I thought it would be a commonplace item now, as technology has evolved so dramatically.

NIGEL

Yeah, I think we've evolved right past quartz rods. Everything else sounds likely, though. Let's go out after breakfast and see what we can find, ok?

Lights fade out as NIGEL starts pulling out breakfast cereal boxes and pouring coffee.

SCENE

Lights up on the basement room with the time machine, only now, there are two time machines, one next to the other. MORIARTY is pacing around them, agitated, and not looking anywhere near as frail as THAD's story made him seem.

MORIARTY

By God, where are you hiding, you little rascalion!

MORIARTY searches around the two time machines, but to no avail.

MORIARTY

Give me drugged brandy, will you, Gregson!? I'll see that you get the threshing of your life, stealing my machine! God save you when I get you in my grasp! I've a right mind to...

Now then, Moriarty, don't expend your energy all in one go. He's bound to return sooner or later. He'll want to return to his own time, and when he does, you've got him! But what's this! Broken! He's broken my machine! Serves him right! I should leave him here, with his broken machine. See if that addleheaded young wretch can fix it, or if he's as simple as he appears.

Lights down

SCENE

Lights up on NIGEL's apartment

NIGEL and THAD enter, with bags of stuff from their shopping trip. Brass and copper accents are prominent.

NIGEL

Dude, that was amazing. The way you talked that guy into just giving you those copper rods! I've never seen anyone haggle like you!

THAD

It was nothing, I assure you. Merely normal business procedure. I am amazed the practice has died off. How much beer could one purchase for the \$800 we just spent?

NIGEL

Oh, don't worry about that, I can afford to splurge a little, it's not like I have a ton of big expenses.

THAD

Very well, and thank you again, but I'm curious how inflation has modified values of items. I would have guessed that what we acquired today would be the equivalent of a tailored suit of clothing, perhaps two. Or several hogsheads of beer.

NIGEL

Well, I have no idea what a hogshead is, but \$800 would probably buy about 8 kegs of beer, depending on what kind of beer you got. It would buy a suit of clothes if you didn't have it tailored, I guess, or maybe if you had something just modified by a tailor.

THAD

Of course, I suppose clothing is designed and created by machines now, rather than requiring the labor of a human tailor. The technology of this era is fascinating!

NIGEL

Well, no, it still takes labor from humans, but that labor's done by workers in China or Malaysia for a few bucks an hour or something.

THAD

Oh, and that's... That can't be a great deal of money now, can it?

NIGEL

No, I guess not. But I don't want to talk about depressing stuff like that. When do you want to go back and try to get the time machine working?

THAD

I like your plan: let's eat luncheon, and make our first attempt after we've eaten.

Lights fade out.

SCENE*Lights up on the basement room. There is only one time machine present, as before.*

NIGEL and THAD walk in carelessly, carrying their bags.

THAD

Just set those things down there if you would, old chap. I believe I shall soon have this machine up and running.

NIGEL sets down his bag and leans over the time machine to examine it as THAD starts pulling things out of bags and assembling them.

NIGEL

So, how does this thing work, anyway? Did you figure it out?

THAD

Oh yes, I believe so. The plans and details I found with your computer were somewhat unorthodox, I confess, having been distorted and misunderstood through the intervening years, but they contained enough of a seed of truth that I was able to recall and interpret the Professor's remarks and my own observations.

NIGEL

So? How does it work?

THAD

That is an excellent question, but not one I am fully qualified to answer. I'll give it a try, though. Are you familiar with the aetheric fluid?

NIGEL

Probably not.

THAD

No, I suspect you wouldn't be. It's a very advanced concept of how the universe is structured. We are surrounded, in many dimensions, by an incompressible fluid, which we call the aetheric fluid. It transcends dimensions, and enables the flow of energy and matter between the various dimensions, much like metal enables the flow of electricity from a galvanic jar.

NIGEL

Wait, a fluid? Like water?

THAD

Well, somewhat like water. Obviously intangible to us when compared with water, but yes, similar in concept. For instance, water is also incompressible.

NIGEL

How does that enable the transfer of whatever between dimensions? That doesn't make any sense.

THAD

It's best not to take the metaphor too far, Nigel. It is simply a medium by which these things are exchanged. But a key property is that it is incompressible. That is how energy is transferred from a star, like our sun, for instance. Obviously without a transport medium, a vacuum would be unable to transmit anything at all. Only certain types of energy and matter can be transmitted, naturally, particularly very powerful energy such as that radiating from the sun and more remote stars.

NIGEL

That's crazy. I thought energy from the sun traveled on electromagnetic waves. That's what they said in school, anyway. I think.

THAD

Well, your school got it wrong, I suspect. I've never heard of these electromagnetic waves, and this machine works on a principle solidly bound to aetheric fluid.

NIGEL

Ok, sure, whatever. I'm sure your century-old technology and science is completely correct. Please continue.

THAD

As I was saying, this device is strongly tied to the aetheric fluid model. These here are the galvanic jars which provide the power for the mechanism. They are certainly the most fragile pieces. They provide electrical power to this section, which is a sort of aetheric fluid pump, if you will, much like a water pump. It works by charging the fluid as it passes through these rings—when they're working properly, they give off a faint blue glow, which is a side-effect of the fluid moving swiftly. The fluid then moves by way of the conduit here...

NIGEL

That quartz rod is conduit?

THAD

Most assuredly. It may look solid to you and me, but it is a very efficient conductor of aetheric fluid. As you can see, it moves around the front, to these spheres, which act much like a nozzle or lens, concentrating and shaping the flow of the fluid. This reshaped flow moves to envelop the craft, and these bars here divert the high-speed fluid away from the passenger. These rings here collapse the flow on the far side of the craft.

NIGEL

Wait, so the whole thing is an aetheric fluid spraybottle?

THAD

I suspect so. What's a spraybottle?

NIGEL

It's a bottle with a nozzle that sprays a mist of—

THAD

Oh, an atomizer! Yes, very much like that, although more intricate, obviously. In any case, this machine works by creating a flow of aetheric fluid about itself, which allows it, in effect, to detach from the normal three dimensions we call home, and traverse higher-order dimensions. These toothed wheels here, although they don't spin, generate the force which moves the craft along the dimensional planes. They're controlled by these wheels and indicators here, which are still set for 130 years forward.

NIGEL

So, does it take more power to travel a greater distance in time?

THAD

One would imagine so, but that's not the case. In fact, the greatest energy expenditure is in overcoming the aetheric fluid's sluggishness in the first place. Once the transition has been made, actual movement is apparently quite effortless.

NIGEL

The transition to another dimension?

THAD

Exactly.

NIGEL

Huh.

Lights fade out as THAD goes back to work on the machine.

SCENE

Lights up on NIGEL's apartment. It is night time, and the day has been spent working on the time machine.

NIGEL and THAD walk back in the door. NIGEL looks tired, but THAD looks animated and excited.

NIGEL

I can't believe you did all that for nothing.

THAD

Oh, not for nothing. Hardly for nothing. I believe I made excellent progress today. Why, I proved that at least three of my conjectures were correct, and the machine is materially nearer to being functional again.

NIGEL

Ok, that's great, but how long is this going to take? I don't want to spend my life ferrying you back and forth between here and Queens every day, you know?

THAD

Oh, have no fear! Unless I'm greatly mistaken, I should have the repairs complete in another day or two, possibly three. Then I shall be able to return to my own time, and restore the Professor's good name, and resume my life as I left it.

At this point, the door bursts open, and MORIARTY steps into the room, two antique revolvers in his hands.

NIGEL

What the fuck!?

THAD (simultaneous with NIGEL)

Dear god, Professor Moriarty!

MORIARTY advances into the room, eyeing both NIGEL and THAD malevolently.

MORIARTY

So, you thought you could run, did you? Thought you could elude me by traveling to the future!? I have you now, you despicable sewer urchin! You're no better than the day I took you in! How dare you steal my machine!

THAD

Steal? Whatever do you mean, Professor? I stole nothing: I was intoxicated and made a misjudgement, I'll agree, however, there was no theft intended, I assure you! Please, put the revolvers down! There's no need for that!

MORIARTY

So you claim, indolent bastard. If it was not theft, why did you not return? Why was I free to spend the next 5 years building a second machine to come after you!? How do you explain this behavior, if not in the context of larceny?

THAD

But, I never returned? I am even now working to repair the machine, which was damaged when I arrived. If I never returned... Then is reverse movement impossible?

MORIARTY

Nonsense! Once the machine is upon the aetheric plane, travel in any direction is possible. If we were able to move forward, we will be able to move backward, and laterally. Do not distract me from my revenge, you whoreson!

THAD

But I assure you, Professor Moriarty, there is no revenge to be taken! My friend Nigel can confirm that I have been working dilligently to restore the machine to working order so that I may return!

MORIARTY

Nigel? I suppose that's this foppish drone here?

NIGEL

Who are you calling a foppish drone, grandpa?

MORIARTY

I assure you lad, I am no one's grandfather, and you are not in a position to complain.

MORIARTY gestures with the pair of pistols in his hands.

NIGEL

Look, you old asshole. I don't know what kind of game you and your friend are playing here, but I'm getting sick of it, ok!? I have enough shit of my own to deal with, without having to get involved in your weird cosplay, get me? Get the fuck out of my house, both of you, before I call the cops!

MORIARTY

No, you are clearly complicit in this thief's actions. I will do no such thing until young Thaddeus and I have resolved our differences. *[He produces a device which looks like two boxes connected by 10 feet of fabric-covered wire, and throws one box to NIGEL]* Catch!

NIGEL reflexively catches the box, and MORIARTY operates a knife switch on his box. NIGEL goes perfectly still, and the light on him goes a weird shade. He's been frozen.

MORIARTY

There, he sha'nt cause us any further trouble for the moment.

THAD

By the name of God, Professor, have you killed him!?

MORIARTY

No, he's held immobile in the temporal plane. I've arrested his forward progress. Dogs recover from it completely in the lab, a little sideline I explored while I was constructing my replacement time machine. I had hoped to use it on you, but your compatriot was becoming tiresome, and I would prefer to avoid taking life where possible.

THAD

But this really is unthinkable, Professor! You had no need to come rescue me...

He is cut off by a cellphone ring, either one of the iconic ringtones, or a popular song played through tinny speakers. The audience should clearly recognize it as a cellphone ringing.

MORIARTY

What the devil is that noise!?

THAD

I couldn't say, Professor. Technology in this time has advanced to an astounding level, it could be nearly anything.

The cellphone ring cuts off, and is followed a few seconds later by a different tone to indicate that a message has been left. THAD and MORIARTY listen to this sequence of sounds with the air of people who are expecting the slightest movement to bring danger. When it becomes clear that nothing more is forthcoming, they relax a bit, and continue.

MORIARTY

Well, it seems to have stopped, whatever it was. Now, what was I... Oh yes. What have you to say for yourself, Mr. Gregson?

THAD

Oh, Professor, please don't say that, surely our friendship has not devolved to such a degree?

MORIARTY

After five years of expecting you back every day, and being disappointed every day, I cannot say what the state of our friendship is, sir. Now answer for yourself!

THAD

It is just as I have explained. My machine was damaged when I arrived: it may have fallen some distance to the ground. I have procured sufficient materials to repair it, and am in the midst of effecting repairs even now. I had hoped to return to a point a few minutes after my departure, to ensure a minimum of paradoxical complications, and thus prevent any of the history I now read from occurring. Although if I have read the history here, it now strikes me as likely that I was unable to return.

THAD ponders for a moment, then looks back up at MORIARTY.

THAD

Wait a moment, Professor. You said you worked on the new vessel for five years? But how is that possible? The history I read said that you were jailed after being convicted for my death, and that you died in prison!

MORIARTY

I did no such thing! There was never police involvement in the matter. I convinced your weakminded wife that you had run off with another woman to live in Scotland.

THAD

What!?

MORIARTY

She was naturally distraught, but it seemed the best explanation without letting her know the exact nature of my experimentation.

THAD

But... Maria! I did no such thing! I've never been unfaithful in my life! How dare you propagate such slander!

MORIARTY has by this time become convinced that the revolvers are no longer required, and puts them away. His attitude softens.

MORIARTY

What else would you have had me say, boy!? What other plausible explanation could I give for your disappearance!? You know that Jenks and his little cabal at the Royal Society considered me mad, and never would have stood for the truth.

THAD

But... *[Pause as he considers the implications]* Very well, it is done, and with our time machines, it can be undone. We shall return to a time before your actions, and restore my good name.

MORIARTY

I am still extremely displeased with your actions, young Thaddeus.

THAD

As I've explained, Professor, my actions—

There is a knock at the door.

MORIARTY pulls out one of his revolvers, and goes to open it.

MORIARTY

What the devil could this interruption be? It must be past ten o'clock in the evening!

MORIARTY opens the door quickly, to reveal JEANETTE, standing dressed in an overcoat.

JEANETTE

[Her eyes closed] Take me, Nigel, I'm yours!

JEANETTE throws off her overcoat to reveal a ridiculously ornate teddy.

THAD and MORIARTY stand, staring at JEANETTE, slackjawed for a moment. MORIARTY recovers first.

MORIARTY

Good God, who is this strumpet!? Get in here, girl, do you want the entire world viewing this shameful display? Put that coat back on!

JEANETTE opens her eyes, and confusion spreads across her face.

JEANETTE

Wait a minute. Who are you guys? Where's Nigel? What's with the costumes?

THAD hustles JEANETTE over to the sofa to sit down. She does so, but reluctantly.

THAD

My dear, I am Thaddeus Gregson, and this is my mentor, Professor James Moriarty.

JEANETTE

[Spying NIGEL] Oh, there you are! What are you looking like that for? Don't you even want to say hello or that I look nice?

MORIARTY

[To himself] I should have brought a brace of those damn things!
[To JEANETTE] Dear lady, I'm not sure what your purpose is here, but your friend is in no state to receive you at the moment. You had best just go, we have matters to settle.

JEANETTE

What do you mean? Is he still mad about the jacket? I said I was sorry. Anyway, who are you guys?

THAD

As I said, I am Thaddeus—

JEANETTE

Yeah, I got that the first time, I'm not stupid, you know. I mean, who the hell are you? *[Getting up]* And why isn't he moving? *[Crossing to NIGEL]* He's not even breathing! What is going on here!?

MORIARTY

[Gesturing with the revolver, which had been down by his side]
We are friends of Nigel. I explained before, we have business to settle, and your involvement is not welcome at this point!

JEANETTE

Why would a friend of Nigel have a gun? What are you really doing here? Is this a robbery?

THAD

[Moving quickly to JEANETTE] No, madam, I assure you, this is not a robbery. It's rather more than I can easily explain to you at the moment. It would be best if you would leave us, and come back at another time. I assure you, Nigel is not in any danger from us. We are scientists.

JEANETTE

You don't look like scientists. I'm not leaving. You guys can tell me what's going on, or I can call the police, they'll probably be interested in a couple of guys dressed up all weird playing with guns, right?

MORIARTY

Fine, would you like a complete explanation? I assure you, you won't understand most of it, my lady. *[Puts the revolver away]*
Please sit down.

JEANETTE reluctantly sits. After a tense moment, MORIARTY and THAD sit as well.

MORIARTY

As my assistant explained, I am Professor James Moriarty, lately of London, lecturer in advanced physics at Camford University. In the year 1868, I began a study of the aetheric fluid, which led, over the course of several years, to a theory that this fluid could be harnessed and manipulated to travel along the temporal plane...

Lights fade out as MORIARTY is explaining.

SCENE

Lights up on the basement room, where there are two time machines, side by side.

AGENT 147 and AGENT 233 are looking over the machines, and waving around little Star-Trek-like tricorder sensors. They're dressed in MIB suits and sunglasses. Roles are gender neutral, but masculine pronouns will be used for convenience's sake.

AGENT 147

Whaddaya think, two-three-three? This looks like the source of the temporal disturbance Central detected. You got an era?

AGENT 233

[Consulting his device] Looks like late 19th. This one here is a mix. Musta mixed in contemporary 21st parts, the scanner doesn't like it.

AGENT 147

Look here. This piece looks different. Oh, and here's something. *[Bends down and picks up one of the broken parts]* Looks like our unlicensed Skippers are making repairs.

The two AGENTs examine the machines again in silence for a moment.

AGENT 147

Hardly seems like something this archaic would be capable of Skipping, does it. It's a wonder anyone worked out the theories so far back.

AGENT 233

Makes you wonder if they were seeded by a rogue Skipper. It wouldn't be the first time.

AGENT 147

No, I know, I worked on that case with Gunderson. What a clusterfuck that was.

AGENT 233

Indeed. I only read about it. In any case, I think we've found our disturbance. Let's check back and see what Central wants to do about it.

AGENT 147

What, you think "Rectify the situation" was unclear?

AGENT 233

By the book. It's not an emergent situation, and now that we have details we should check back in. Given the apparent source era, Central may want to handle it differently than normal.

AGENT 147

[Mockingly] By the book. I wish everything in life were as cut-and-dried as that.

AGENT 233

Noted. Let's get back. I don't want to waste time on this.

AGENT 147

Does it ever strike you as odd that we, of all people, should use a phrase like "waste time?"

AGENT 233

Gee, one-four-seven, I didn't realize you stopped aging when you Skipped.

AGENT 147

That's not what I... Oh, never mind. Did you ever have a philosophical thought in your life?

AGENT 233

Yes. I just don't waste energy and *time* considering them when I'm supposed to be doing my job. Let's get going.

AGENT 147

Fine. See you on the flip side.

They both pull out different devices, and activate them.

Lights go weird before fading out. SFX of some variety to indicate time travel is occurring.

SCENE

Lights back up on NIGEL's apartment.

JEANETTE is seated on the sofa, and MORIARTY and THAD are standing. NIGEL has been moved offstage, presumably still frozen.

JEANETTE

That is so *weird* to think about! I can't believe you guys are really from a hundred years ago!

MORIARTY

But it is God's own truth, young lady. In fact, you may be of assistance to us.

JEANETTE

What can *I* do?

THAD looks as surprised as *JEANETTE* sounds.

MORIARTY

I have a theory about the nature of time, and artifacts which are displaced through time. I should greatly appreciate your assistance locating and procuring a suitable artifact to take back to our time with us.

JEANETTE

Are you talking about stealing something?

MORIARTY

No, no, I assure you! We do not desire to cause any commotion, we simply wish to take something small, but definitely of this era, back with us. We, being from the past, know nothing of your technology, or what might be appropriate.

JEANETTE

Well, this isn't really my specialty. This is more like something Nigel could do well. Why don't we ask him?

THAD

Yes, I'll go disable your device, Professor, Mr. Kaminski does seem highly conversant with this era's conveniences.

MORIARTY

No! No, I believe the young lady knows better how to assist us. In any case, she's much easier to deal with, thus far.

JEANETTE

Wait, why did you guys freeze Nigel, anyway? What happened?

MORIARTY

He became agitated, and at the time, it seemed easier to deal with him by placing him into a temporal stasis than through rational discussion.

THAD

Well, Professor, the mood is surely calmer now, let us release him from his temporal prison. I'm quite sure he will understand once we explain matters to him.

MORIARTY

Wait! Wait. The fact is, I'm not sure what will happen. When we release the device, I mean.

THAD

What do you mean?

MORIARTY

I cannot be certain.

THAD

What can be the problem, Professor? You tested the device, you said, am I recalling correctly?

MORIARTY

Of course I tested the device! I told you, I tested it on canines in the lab!

JEANETTE

You tested on dogs? Oh my *God!* That is *so* cruel!

THAD

Very well, you tested, surely there remains no difficulty.

MORIARTY

Truth be told, young Thaddeus, the test subjects did not always recover fully.

THAD

And you were intending to use this device on me? A device which may have resulted in harm to me?

MORIARTY

Only ten percent of the subjects had any trouble! In any case, I firmly believed you had stolen my time machine from me! If you were to be harmed as a result of my device, I was not entirely averse to that outcome. I apologise for so misusing you, even in thought if not in deed. But it does leave us with a conundrum regarding your friend.

JEANETTE

I'll say! If you hurt Nigel, you'll be lookin' at one pissed off girlfriend!

MORIARTY

Quite. Well, there is, perhaps, no time like the present. Whatever damage has been done to Mr. Kaminski has already been committed to. You'd best go unfreeze him, Thaddeus.

THAD exits.

SFX of time resuming.

After a moment, NIGEL gives a scream from offstage. NIGEL and THAD re-enter, NIGEL

leaning heavily on *THAD*.

MORIARTY

Tell me, my boy, what did you experience? What was it like?

THAD

Professor, please! He's had a rough time of it, I dare say.

THAD pours out a glass of scotch, which he hands to NIGEL, who sips it, then downs the whole thing. JEANETTE goes to his side and puts her arm around NIGEL.

JEANETTE

How are you feeling, honey?

NIGEL

Wha? How did you get here?

JEANETTE

I walked, silly.

NIGEL

What the hell are you wearing?

JEANETTE

Oh, uh, nothing.

NIGEL

Nothing? Should I ask why you're wearing nothing?

MORIARTY

Yes, yes, can you resume this conversation later? I'm eager to hear what your experience was, lad!

NIGEL looks bleakly at MORIARTY for a long moment.

NIGEL

Give me one good reason I shouldn't kick your ass.

MORIARTY

I have never owned an ass, in the first place. London is a poor place for livestock. But I do apologize for freezing you like that. However, granted that I feel terrible, what did you feel? What did you see?

NIGEL

What are you talking about? One moment I was telling you to get out of my house, the next moment I'm stuck in a Max Headroom video, then I'm in my bedroom. What happened? What was that thing you threw at me?

MORIARTY

It was a device which put you into a state of frozen time. You ceased your travel along the temporal plane. But, how does headroom have any bearing on it? Did you believe you were hitting your head on something?

NIGEL

No, you idiot—

There is an imperious knock at the door.

NIGEL

[Looking at his watch] What time is it? How long was I out?

THAD moves to open the door. The two AGENTs are standing on the other side.

AGENT 233

[Pushing into the room] You're all under arrest for violations of the Universal Time Travel Code, section 5, subsection 3A, paragraphs I through IV. Stay where you are or risk temporal stasis.

AGENT 147 follows him in, holding a futuristic-looking raygun.

MORIARTY

Is this some variety of practical pleasantry!? I am not amused! What is the meaning of this?

AGENT 233

The meaning of this is that you've beek Skipping without a license. Do you have the slightest idea what kind of havoc you can wreak by travelling in time!?

MORIARTY

Of course I do! What do you take me for, a simpleton? What is that device your friend is pointing at us? I gather from his attitude that it's meant to be a weapon of some variety.

AGENT 147

Never you mind, wise guy, just do as we say, and no one gets hurt.

MORIARTY

And why should we pay you any heed, other than your children's toy, there?

THAD

Professor, please, there is no need to make this situation any worse than it already is!

AGENT 233

You listen to your friend there, Professor. As I was saying, you're all under arrest for Skipping without a license, which is an infraction under the Universal Time Travel Code. Now, are you going to come quietly, or do we get to use our "children's toy?"

MORIARTY

Under whose authority are we arrested?

AGENT 233

Under the authority of the United Nations Commission on Temporal Activities. If you haven't heard of it, that'd be because it doesn't exist in your time. It won't be formed until 2065 AD, but was granted retroactive authority over all time-travel activities from 10,000 BCE onward.

AGENT 147

Yeah, can't have any dipshits going back to mess with the Pharoes or anything, can we.

MORIARTY

Do you mean to tell me that time travel has been restricted back to ten thousand BC? When it offers such a boon to the historian? This is an outrage!

AGENT 233

No, it means if you want to do that, you have to have a license, and your plan has to be approved by the Commission. Unlicensed Skipping is punishable by time exile. You don't wanna end up dodging gamma rays as the sun dies, you'll come quietly.

AGENT 147

Yeah, it's like a death sentence, but with irony.

AGENT 233 looks irked at the interruption.

NIGEL

Why are you arresting all of us? I didn't do anything! This crazy woman stole my jacket, this crazy guy tells me he arrived by time machine, and now you're telling me I'm under arrest for something I didn't do!? This is utterly fucked!

JEANETTE

Yeah! *[Pause as she realizes what's just been said]* Hey, wait!

AGENT 233

Your protests are immaterial. If you're innocent, you'll be found so by a jury of your peers. Well, pretty much your peers, anyway.

JEANETTE

What do you mean, "crazy lady!?" Are you talking about me? I'm not crazy!

NIGEL

Honey, right now, I don't see any sane people in the room, myself included. What I do see is two nuts who claim to be from a hundred years ago, two nuts who claim to be from 50 years in the future, and two nuts who are wrapped up in it all! Well, I'm done!

NIGEL throws a punch at AGENT 233, and all hell breaks loose. Everyone is struggling with everyone else, mayhem. One of the Professor's revolvers comes out, and it goes off, dropping AGENT 147. THAD grabs for 147's raygun, and uses it on AGENT 233 who screams, clutches at his head, and falls on the ground, perfectly still. He's frozen much as NIGEL was earlier.

SFX: raygun noise, time freezing noise.

Lights change on AGENT 233 to indicate the time freeze.

MORIARTY

Well then.

NIGEL

Holy shit.

THAD

[Going over to AGENT 147] Oh dear, this one's badly hurt! Look, he's bleeding! We have to help him!

NIGEL

What are you, stupid? He wanted to shoot us!

THAD

He was just trying to do his job.

NIGEL

Yeah, which was to shoot us! Pardon me for not seeing the value in his job being to go around shooting people who didn't do anything.

MORIARTY

Gentlemen, there's no need to squabble over these matters.

NIGEL

Oh, great, so what's your plan now, Professor Smartypants? Do you have another fantastic device to get us all out of trouble when these guys' friends show up? If they're really cops, they'll have backup here shortly. If they're time-traveling cops, I'm not sure why they haven't already arrived, but whatever. I'll take the grace I can get.

MORIARTY

I can't say I'm fond of your tone, young man.

NIGEL

Oh yes! Now is *definitely* the time to start bickering about *manners*.

MORIARTY

How dare you speak to me so! I am your senior, and you will address me as such!

JEANETTE

Jesus Christ! Will you shitheads shut up for one moment!?

There is a pause as all eyes turn to JEANETTE. She's lost the "dumb blonde" act and is all business now, clearly smarter than she was originally letting on.

JEANETTE

Nigel is right! If these guys are cops, their backup is going to be here any minute. We have to deal with this right now.

She bends down to check out AGENT 147, who is lying with his hand clutched around his arm. She gently pries his hand loose.

JEANETTE

Don't just stand there, help me get his jacket off. If we're lucky, he's just got a flesh wound. If we're unlucky, he got hit in the artery. There's a lot of blood, but I won't know for sure until I can see it.

NIGEL

Jeanette? I had no idea...

JEANETTE

That I wasn't just a ditzzy blonde in a miniskirt? Shock, I know. Now come on, lift him up.

NIGEL and THAD help JEANETTE lift up AGENT 147 and get his jacket off. His shirt is well-soaked in blood with a ragged tear in the sleeve.

JEANETTE

Oh good, he just got grazed. It probably hurts like fuck, though, right guy?

AGENT 147

Augh! Gnnnnn...

JEANETTE

Nigel, you call 911, he'll be ok, but I bet this could use some stitches. You, old-timey, get me a washcloth and some hot water. The hotter the better. Get some soap, too.

NIGEL pulls out his phone and dials. THAD gets up to find the requested items, and NIGEL points out where to get them.

JEANETTE

Nigel, do you have any anti-bacterial stuff in this shithole?

NIGEL

[Putting the phone away, done with his call] Yeah, I'll go get it.

JEANETTE tends to AGENT 147 in silence for a few moments.

JEANETTE

Ok, what do we tell the medics when they show up? Where's this guy's phaser?

MORIARTY

What are you talking about? Who put you in charge, in any case, young lady?

JEANETTE

All you guys were doing was arguing. I'm taking care of problems. You don't like it, you can leave. In fact, you probably should leave.

MORIARTY

I see no need to subject myself to the imperious whims of a mere girl!

Lightning-fast, JEANETTE slaps MORIARTY across the face.

JEANETTE

Welcome to 2010, asshole. Girls have a little more say, now. And this girl says, start being helpful, or get the fuck out.

MORIARTY is completely taken aback by this behavior, and stands in stunned silence for a moment.

MORIARTY

Very well, I see the merit of your position. How can I help?

JEANETTE

You and... Shit, what's your name again?

THAD

Thaddeus Gregson.

JEANETTE

Right. You and Thad here, take this guy [*indicating AGENT 233*] and put him in the bedroom or something. No way do we want to explain that to the medics. Nigel, what did you tell 911?

NIGEL

I just said that there was a man injured. They asked how he was injured, and I said he was bleeding, didn't say why.

JEANETTE

Good. They probably won't send cops, at least. [*To THAD and MORIARTY*] Well? Get lifting! Go!

THAD and MORIARTY jump as if stung, and start hauling AGENT 233 offstage.

SFX: at the edge of hearing, a siren gets louder then stops. It should never be intrusive, and the audience might be excused for thinking it was a real siren outside the theater.

NIGEL

Jeanette... Why didn't you just act like this at first? Why the act?

JEANETTE

Really, Nigel? Now? You want to have this discussion with three centuries of humanity improbably represented in your apartment, emergency services on the way, and most likely more future men showing up at any moment with future tech weapons to find out why their buddies haven't checked back in?

NIGEL

You're right, that does sound kind of stupid. Later, then.

JEANETTE

Good. Now, we have to get our story straight. You, future man, what's your name?

AGENT 147

I've never been shot with a bullet before. This is barbarism!

JEANETTE

Yeah, ok, very nice. What's your name? Do you have any ID we'd recognize? When the medics show up, we'd better have a good story for them. What do you recommend?

AGENT 147 fumbles in his jacket, and produces his time-traveling gizmo. JEANETTE snatches it out of his hand.

JEANETTE

Oh no! Unless this thing heals wounds or something, this is a no-no! I don't want to be frozen or shot or anything else.

AGENT 147

None of your fucking business what it does!

AGENT 147 body-slams JEANETTE and grabs his device, poking at buttons as he dashes out the door. He has to juggle the device and the doorknob with his one good hand, then he's gone.

SFX: time travel noise. Crazy lights through the open door.

All stand stunned in the room. THAD and MORIARTY have returned in time to see 147 dash out. NIGEL goes to the door and looks out, then closes it.

NIGEL

Well, he's gone. His backup can't be far behind, now.

There is another scream from AGENT 233, offstage.

Another SFX time travel noise, and possibly lights from the direction AGENT 233 was dragged.

THAD

What the devil?

THAD looks back into the bedroom, then comes out again.

THAD

Well, the other one's gone too. He must have come out of his stasis. Perhaps it has some kind of limitation on it so people are not inadvertently frozen forever.

There's a knock on the door.

MEDIC 1

Open the door, emergency medical tech! We got a call that there was an injured man in this apartment!

NIGEL goes to the door and opens it, to reveal MEDIC 1 and MEDIC 2.

NIGEL

Good evening, sir. Uh...

JEANETTE

[Dumb blonde act is back] Oh no! Was someone hurt!?

MEDIC 1

There was a man bleeding reported in this apartment. This is apartment 337, right?

NIGEL

That's us, but there's no one bleeding here, sir!

MEDIC 1

Are you sure?

NIGEL

Uh, yeah, pretty sure.

MEDIC 1

Ah Christ, not again. I swear to God, we should stop responding to anonymous calls. C'mon Jim, let's get outta here. Sorry to disturb you, folks. Get back to your... *[Eyes the weird assemblage]* Whatever you were doing.

MEDIC 1 closes the door, and everyone left in the room heaves a sigh of relief.

MORIARTY here makes an inappropriate comment, along the lines of My God, you let Negroes tend to your wounded? Obviously this will depend a great deal upon who plays MEDIC 1.

JEANETTE

I cannot *believe* you just said that.

MORIARTY

I take it this is something else which has changed since 1880.

NIGEL and JEANETTE

Yes!

MORIARTY

I shall endeavor to correct my behavior. However, young Thaddeus, I find myself with an increasing desire to return to our own time, and leave this strange place. What say you?

THAD

Yes. . . Yes, I suppose so. I will be unhappy to leave quite so soon, there is so much to see! Did you see the city at all, Professor? The wonders that are available even within one hundred feet of us are unimaginable!

MORIARTY

I am quite certain, my lad, that staying where we are will only get us into trouble. I'm not at all sure that returning to our time will be much safer, but at least we won't be running afoul of our lack of knowledge at every turn. I don't know about you, boy, but I find that I greatly dislike not understanding my surroundings.

THAD

No, of course, you're correct. Yes.

THAD looks wistfully around the apartment.

NIGEL

Look, I hate to break this up, but I think we'd *all* better leave, at least for a little while. Who knows when those guys in the suits will come back, but I don't want to be here when they do.

THAD

How did they find us, do you suppose?

NIGEL

Who knows? They have access to the entire spectrum of human technology, I assume. They could have used telepathy, for all I know.

THAD

Well, I agree with Nigel, Professor: we had best be going. Perhaps we can return later.

MORIARTY

Indeed.

NIGEL

If you don't mind, I'm curious to see your machine operate. Can I take you guys back to that room in Queens, and watch you take off?

THAD

That would be most appreciated. I feel much safer in this time having a guide who knows its ways.

MORIARTY

I'm not certain it's a good idea. I made my own way here without any trouble...

THAD

How do we know it wasn't you wandering around that caught the attention of those time cops?

MORIARTY

I'm quite certain that my activities were not the subject of any surveillance, young man. But your point is taken.

NIGEL

Anyway, I just want to see what it looks like. I've seen lots of movies with special effects for this kind of thing, it'll be cool to see it in real life. Of course, no one will believe me, but at least I'll have seen it. Jeanette, you coming?

JEANETTE

Yeah, I guess so. I could use some more clothes, though. Could I borrow something from you?

NIGEL

Uh, sure. Bedroom's back that way, just look in the dresser.

JEANETTE exits. There is a long pause as the three men each individually ponder the image of the attractive young woman changing clothes in the next room.

NIGEL

[Brightly, breaking the tension] So! What do you think of your trip into the future, Professor?

MORIARTY

I can honestly say that it has been one of the oddest experiences of my life.

THAD

I'm utterly fascinated by the technology which has developed in only 130 years!

NIGEL

Did you know that we've traveled to the moon now?

THAD

You don't say! When did it happen?

NIGEL

Well, actually, 1969. It's been a while.

THAD

And are there any inhabitants of the moon now? You must have made great progress since that time!

NIGEL

Actually... Not as such. We only went a few times, and haven't been back.

THAD

Really! Whyever not? It must be a fascinating place!

NIGEL

I think it's too expensive. I mean, I guess that's the reason. I don't really know.

THAD

Oh. [*Disappointed*] I had rather hoped that money would be rendered obsolete by now.

NIGEL

Nope! Still going strong.

JEANETTE returns, dressed in an oversized shirt and pyjama bottoms, pulling on her overcoat.

JEANETTE

Ok, let's get moving.

They all file out of the room.

Lights fade down.

SCENE

Lights fade up on the two time machines in the basement room.

AGENT 147 and AGENT 233 are leaning nonchalantly around the room, clearly waiting for our heroes to return.

THAD and MORIARTY enter the room and are quickly apprehended by some kind of freeze-ray from the two AGENTS. NIGEL and JEANETTE follow them in a moment later, and there's a sort of Mexican stand-off as the AGENTS realize they only have two freeze rays and four people to deal with.

SFX of freeze rays.

AGENT 147

Don't move, you two! You're under arrest!

NIGEL and JEANETTE turn and run out of the room quickly enough that the AGENTS can't stop them.

AGENT 147

Dammit, two-three-three! Why didn't you stop them!?

AGENT 233

I will discuss this with you back at Central. If you're lucky, I won't put it in my report.

AGENT 147

Don't give me that tone. At least we got these two. They look like the travelers, judging by their dress.

AGENT 233

Ok, sure. I guess we can come back for the other two.

AGENT 147

You ready?

AGENT 233 nods.

SFX of time travel sound as lights fade quickly to black.

SCENE

Lights up on a small room, like a police interrogation room.

A LAWYER enters and sits on one side of the table, and THAD and MORIARTY sit on the other. The LAWYER has an electronic tablet of some variety, which she refers to occasionally.

LAWYER

You boys understand why you're here?

MORIARTY and THAD exchange a glance, in which they decide that THAD should be the spokesman for the moment.

THAD

Honestly, madam, no, we don't.

LAWYER

Ok, let's start with the basics. When are you guys from?

THAD

1880. London.

LAWYER

Ok, great. And it says here [*Consulting her tablet*] that you're from... Well, you don't probably care what timeline you're from, do you.

MORIARTY

[*Unable to contain himself*] Timeline? What does that mean, pray tell?

LAWYER

Ok, right. So, every time there's any kind of a decision made, a separate timeline spawns off. Since there are between billions and trillions of such decisions being made every second, you can imagine there are quite a few timelines by now. Lots. Anyway, one of the jobs of the United Nations Commission on Temporal Activities, or UNCTA, is to catalog the major timelines. You know, whether Napoleon won or lost at Waterloo, whether Jesus gathered a following, Admiral Brayton at the Battle of Mare Tranquilitatis, that kind of thing. There are about 300 million major timelines we keep track of right now, but that number's growing as we find more of them.

THAD

Pardon me, you said, "Right now." When is right now, exactly?

LAWYER

The current year is 2173. It's not very much like 1880s London, I'll tell you that right now. Today's date is April 15, and the current time is 10:49.

THAD

You sound very certain of that.

LAWYER

[*Tapping her temple*] Implant. Communications and data; keeps me on time, too.

MORIARTY

Speak sense, woman! That was hardly English, much less meaningful communication!

LAWYER

Look, don't push me, ok! I'm your court-appointed counsel, and if you piss me off, you're on your own! [*Calming down*] Sorry, it's been a rough week. An implant is an electronic device which, in my case, communicates with my nervous system in order to allow me to talk to other people from a great distance, and access information stored in remote locations. It's like a telegraph for your brain, sort of. Most of the concepts weren't invented by 1880, I don't think. If you don't understand, don't worry about it. It's not relevant to what we have to talk about today.

THAD

My companion is somewhat excitable, Miss...

LAWYER

Just call me Meg, we don't stand much on formality these days.

THAD

That seems to be an increasing theme upon our travels.

LAWYER

Anyway, where was I? Oh right, timelines. No matter. Why don't you boys tell me your story?

THAD

Very well. As I suspect you know, I am Thaddeus Gregson, and this is Professor James Moriarty. Professor Moriarty is an eminent... was an eminent scientist, researching upon uses of the aetheric fluid—

LAWYER

Woah, hold up. What's aetheric fluid?

THAD

It's an incompressible fluid which—

LAWYER

Oh, got it. [*Taps her temple again*]. Wow, that's some weird shit. Anyway, go on.

THAD

[*Uncertainly*] Um, aetheric fluid is...

LAWYER

No, I understand aetheric fluid. It's weird as hell, and definitely wrong, but I get the idea. Continue with your story.

MORIARTY

[Quietly, to himself] This is worse than 2010.

THAD

Ah, in any case, Professor Moriarty is an eminent scientist. For the last 10 years *[He looks at MORIARTY, catching himself]* That is, by my time, for the last 10 years, the Professor has been working on a time travel device which uses the theory of aetheric fluid...

MORIARTY

A perfectly workable theory! One which successfully transported us one hundred twenty five years into the future, thank you kindly!

THAD

Professor, please! Yes, his device uses the theory of aetheric fluid to transition states into a higher-order dimension, and travel upon the temporal plane, much as a ship sails upon the watery sea. Using a galvanic reaction, it allows a person within the device to, in effect, travel in time.

LAWYER

Ok, so he built a time travel device. What happened then?

THAD

Well, on the night of its completion, we celebrated—

LAWYER

Celebrated like got wasted?

MORIARTY

We don't have to sit here and take this abuse! We were not "wasted!" Your future slang is insufferably offensive!

LAWYER

Woah, calm down. I was just checking that we're talking about the same thing. You were drinking alcohol?

THAD

Indeed, that's correct. We were drinking brandy.

LAWYER

Go on.

THAD

Of course. We were celebrating by drinking brandy. I believe we both had rather more than was strictly prudent. I took it into my head to try out the machine, and did so, setting the dial for 130 years into the future, in my inebriated state. I should have set it for 5 minutes...

LAWYER

Ha! If you'd moved five minutes, we'd crown you as a hero!

THAD

Indeed? Professor Moriarty was able to move a mouse five minutes into the past.

LAWYER

Well, we'll get into that later. Anyway, you set the dial for 130 years.

THAD

Exactly. After a short but extremely unpleasant experience, I found myself rolling out of the device's encapsulation cage in a basement room of what I quickly discovered was 2010 New York. I had indeed moved 130 years, but also many thousands of miles...

LAWYER drops her head into her hands.

THAD

[Alarmed] Madam, are you alright?

LAWYER

[Bringing her head up again] Christ! Miles! Do you have any idea... No, I suppose you wouldn't. Never mind. Please continue.

THAD

Very well. As I said, I found myself rolling out of the device. It was broken, and shortly thereafter someone entered the room. We ended up walking back to his flat, and he helped me research plans for the Professor's machine, so that I could repair it.

MORIARTY

And I should like to explain at this point that this is not the complete story. I waited five years for this dunderhead to return my machine, in which time I was able to build another one to come after him!

THAD

Professor, I told you, I was intending to return! In any case, the history I read said that you'd died in prison after two years!

LAWYER

Ok, stop there. Now you're talking about timelines, and that gets incredibly confusing without a database backing your discussion. Just continue with your story, Thaddeus.

THAD

Oh yes? Yes, I can see how that would be. Well, as I said, I was able to find plans for the Professor's machine, and was in the midst of effecting repairs when the Professor himself arrived, with the mistaken apprehension that I had stolen his machine and abandoned him.

MORIARTY

So you claim. Although I will admit that the evidence does begin to mount somewhat in your favor.

There is a silence as both THAD and MORIARTY realize that the LAWYER is fixing them with an icy stare.

THAD

In the name of all that is right and good, what have we done?

LAWYER

Well, to name one, you used a time machine without a license. This is the kind of thing that can be wiggled around, sometimes. But then, for two, you used a time machine, without a license, *while drunk!* Do you have any idea what the penalties are like for that kind of thing?

MORIARTY

I did no such thing, no matter what young addlepate here might have done! In any case, how can we stand accused of infractions we didn't know were prohibited!? This is utterly ludicrous!

LAWYER

Look. I didn't make the laws, and I agree it seems a little strong sometimes, but you have no idea what unlicensed Skipping can do! It can utterly destroy timelines!

MORIARTY

Ah, but surely, if a new timeline is created each time a decision is made...

LAWYER

That's a cute argument, I'm just *sure* it's never been tried before! Why do you think the laws exist? It's sure not because of all the successes past Skippers have had with their adventures. That couldn't be it, could it. Jeez! Ok, let's proceed. Is there anything else to your story? Any other totally incriminating evidence you can come up with for me?

There is an embarrassed silence between THAD and MORIARTY as the LAWYER looks between them.

LAWYER

No? Ok, then there are a couple of sizeable holes in your story there, Thaddeus. First, who was this guy who helped you out? Second, why don't you finish, and tell me about how you came to be in CTA custody?

THAD

[Laughs nervously] Yes, I suppose those are interesting and important elements to the story. Very well. The man who helped me was a resident of New York. I don't know his name, and I can't recall where exactly he lived—

LAWYER

And you spent how long with this guy exactly? And you didn't know his name?

THAD

No! I didn't know his name. We weren't on such a familiar basis. Manners have quite evidently changed since my time, and in 1880, one doesn't exchange names with another without a proper introduction.

MORIARTY

What a load of piffle! Thaddeus, what are you saying?

THAD

[Nudging MORIARTY to get him to shut up] I'm just explaining the social customs of our time, Professor.

MORIARTY

Well, you're making a duck's arse of it. However, do as you see fit.

THAD

Thank you. As I was saying, I didn't know his name. He was assisting me with my attempts to repair the machine when Professor Moriarty arrived with his own machine. He was evidently displeased with me, but calmed down once I explained the situation—

MORIARTY

Don't forget my freezing your friend! That was rather brilliant, if I do say so myself.

THAD

[Despairing, knowing this won't look good] Yes, of course, the Professor froze my helper.

LAWYER

Ok, froze. Like, down to zero degrees, all cold-like?

THAD

[Miserable] No, temporal stasis.

LAWYER

Uh-huh. *[Makes a tick-mark on the tablet]*

THAD

At this point, your officers arrived and apprehended us, and here we are.

LAWYER

[Glancing significantly at her tablet] And that's *all* that happened?

MORIARTY

No, you silly wench! We trounced 'em! Those coppers never knew what hit 'em! I haven't had such fun since my time on the Camford rugby team as a young lad!

LAWYER

[Severely] So, I can add "resisting arrest" to your story, then?

MORAIRTY

Add whatever you like, my good lady. The fact is that your future men were no match for us.

THAD

Professor, please let me tell the story my own way.

LAWYER

Yes, let him tell it his own way. I'm sure it will end up being totally fascinating.

THAD

[Pause] Well, actually, that is the conclusion of my story.

LAWYER

So, your version doesn't include any "trouncing?"

THAD

Well, there may have been a minor scuffle or altercation, I concede.

LAWYER

You concede? It says here you shot one of them with a ballistic weapon, and the other one was subject to his own stasis ray. That doesn't sound like a minor scuffle to me. It says here Agent 147 required nearly 10 seconds with a healing accelerator after that "minor scuffle." For your reference, that's a really freakin' long time.

THAD

If you have the entire story on your device there, why are you asking us about it?

LAWYER

I'm getting your side of the story. Police reports are not well known for their complete accuracy. You do want me to defend you, right?

THAD

Yes, of course. I apologize, I've never had a run in with officers of the law before, this process is new to me, and I can only assume that procedures in 2173 may differ somewhat from those of my time.

LAWYER

Well, one of the things that hasn't changed is that the cops aren't generally going to take your side. We still have lawyers and cops and judges and all that—I can trace my profession back through a thousand years of English law, messed-up as that sounds.

THAD

Oh, I see. Well, you are now in possession of the facts as I can clearly recall them.

LAWYER

Nothing more about your minor altercation, then?

THAD

Oh, yes, of course. Your officers accosted us in Nigel's flat, and said they were going to arrest us for illegal time travel of some variety, which I suspect you have detailed there. There was a scuffle, and one of the Professor's pistols went off. I suspect one of the officer's weapons fired as well, which accounts for both of them.

LAWYER

Wait, who's Nigel?

THAD

[Guiltily] I didn't say Nigel.

LAWYER

Yes you did, you said "Nigel's flat." I thought you said you didn't know his name. This is your helper, right?

THAD

Alright, yes! His name was Nigel, but that's all I know. I really have no idea where he lived.

LAWYER

Ok, skip it for now. So, both weapons fired accidentally?

MORIARTY snorts, but doesn't say anything.

THAD

Yes.

LAWYER

Ok, that's probably enough for now. Mr. Moriarty—

MORIARTY

Professor!

LAWYER

Right, sorry. Professor Moriarty—you understand I'm doing this for your benefit right?—let's hear your story.

MORIARTY

Gladly! Young swiftnoggin here absconded with my time machine after we had a celebratory dram. When he didn't come back, I started building a new time machine, and it damn well took me 5 years to do it. I dropped in on a variety of times before my modulator picked up the resonance of the other machine—

LAWYER

That's how you found Mr. Gregson? You're just a mister, right?

THAD nods assent.

THAD

So that's how you found me! I was wondering at your ability to locate me across such a vast swath of time and space.

LAWYER

Please, let him continue.

MORIARTY

As I was saying, my modulator discovered the resonance of my original time machine, and I tracked it down to New York in 2010. Quite shocked I was too, let me tell me, for young Thad-deus went a far greater distance in time than I would have given even his weak intellect credit for. I rather assumed he would have attempted a smaller span of time, although it became increasingly clear that he hadn't as my own time went on.

THAD

Professor, I must insist that you cease referring to me in such a derogatory manner!

MORIARTY

You do, eh? Five years I waited for you! My trusted companion and assistant, and you simply deserted me! How should I refer to you? Should I shower you with praise for your stellar performance stealing my property and abandoning me? You were able enough when you were there, but it's been ages since I had your hand assisting mine in the lab! How do you think I felt, to toil those years, solitary and wondering, the whole time, what I had done to deserve this treatment? I cannot simply forget those years, no matter what you may attempt to resolve in a few minutes' conversation.

THAD

Oh... I hadn't considered it from that standpoint. Still, could you find it in your heart to offer me the benefit of the doubt? I have worked assiduously to return to your side since I made the mistaken trip.

MORIARTY

I will do my best, but I hope you will also go lightly on me if I should slip and call you a dunderhead again, it has been a near continual epithet in my vocabulary for the last few years. I must admit, it becomes increasingly likely that your absence has not been intentional.

LAWYER

This is sweet and all, but could we get back to your story, Professor?

MORIARTY

My God, woman, but you do have an infernal impatience, don't you!

LAWYER

Look! I can get up and walk out of this room right now, if you want. You'll end up dodging raptors in the Jurassic, or tapdancing on solar radiation! I am your only hope, and you better not fucking forget it!

MORIARTY

Your impertinance does you no credit! How can you be a purveyor of the law, with all the patience of a toddler!? I would affirm before a proper justice, under oath, that you are as mentally advanced as a—

THAD

Professor! Miss... Meg is trying to help us! Calm yourself! What would Dr. Martin say?

MORIARTY

Hang Dr. Martin! That quack did nothing for me!

LAWYER

Ok, calm down. Maybe I was outta line. You're definitely out of line, but I'll overlook that for now, because I got a job to do, and I'm gonna do it well whether you help me out here or not. *[She glares at both of them]* Professor. I think you left off with having found Thaddeus, right?

MORIARTY

Fine. Yes. I found young Thaddeus and his companion Nigel, who I believe I can now name out loud. He and Thaddeus were at his flat some miles from the site of my first machine. I followed them there after secreting my machine near the original, and confronted the young... man over the situation. We discussed it, and were interrupted by the entrance of Mr.... Nigel's young lady, wearing as near nothing as I've ever seen without one actually being in the altogether. There was more discussion, during which this Nigel fellow was frozen by my temporal suspension device, and your constabulary officers arrived. There was, as Thaddeus has already related, a scuffle, and both officers were injured. Or, I should say, one was injured, and the other was frozen. The one who was frozen came out of it some time later and disappeared. The injured one—you know, now I think about it, they referred to each other by number, odd habit—snatched his device out from the hands of our young lady, and disappeared. We returned to the machines to effect repairs, and return, but were interrupted by your officers. They ensorcelled us somehow, and thus we came to be here.

LAWYER

Ok, who's this young lady? I hadn't heard of her from you guys yet.

THAD

I'm sure she's completely unrelated to this matter.

LAWYER

So, you were sleeping with her?

THAD

I beg your pardon!

LAWYER

Christ, it was a joke. Never mind. If she's unrelated, that's for the court to decide. She's in the report, so she's gonna come up. If I don't know about her, I can't defend her part in this whole affair. Now, if I've got this all straight, then you two were the only ones involved in unlicensed Skipping, right?

MORIARTY

If by "Skipping" you mean traveling along the temporal plane in a manner unlike the normal steady progression, then yes. Nigel and the lady never traveled upon the temporal plane.

LAWYER

Ok, that's important. They may be dragged here to testify, but I'm gonna do my best to keep them out of this.

Blackout

SCENE

Lights up on NIGEL's apartment.

NIGEL and JEANETTE are seated, glasses nearby, music playing softly in the background: a casual evening in.

NIGEL

Thank you for dinner, Jeanette, that was really good. I swear, you know the best restaurants.

JEANETTE

No problem. I still feel like I need to make up for that whole jacket thing.

NIGEL

So, what happened with that, exactly? You said something about kleptomania?

JEANETTE

Yeah. It's... It's kind of weird to talk about, I think kleptomania is the subject of jokes more than it's seen as a real problem. I mean... I guess that's what it is. That's what my shrink says. They've got me on this experimental drug for it, naltrexone, but I don't know if it's working.

NIGEL

Weird. So, what does it do?

JEANETTE

What, the medication, or the condition?

NIGEL

I dunno, whichever, I guess. I'm curious about both.

JEANETTE

Well... The condition is that I sometimes get these overwhelming urges to steal things. I normally have, like, zero control over it. Sometimes, I can put stuff back after I steal it, but sometimes, I keep it like it's really important. Usually it's little stuff that's definitely not important. I guess it's kinda weird that way. The medicine is probably helping, I don't think I get the urges as much, but I still do sometimes. The medicine doesn't really do anything else that I can tell, it doesn't seem to have any bad side effects, like migraines or nausea, or crumbling bones or whatever. You know all that really fast talking at the end of drug commercials? None of that, really.

NIGEL

Huh. Well, you're forgiven for the jacket thing, anyway. If that hadn't happened, I wouldn't have met Thad and Moriarty, although at this point I'm not entirely sure I *did* meet them.

JEANETTE

No, you did. I was there, they were real, but they did seem kind of unreal, didn't they.

NIGEL

Yeah. And that freeze thing... *[Shudders]* That was unreal. I'll be happy to never do that again.

JEANETTE

Oh yeah? What happened? I mean, you were frozen when I came in, but when they let you out you screamed. It was all so chaotic, my memory's not real clear about it.

NIGEL

Well, did you ever watch Max Headroom back in the 80s?

JEANETTE

I dunno. Maybe?

NIGEL

There was this thing on the show, called "blipverts." They were basically advertisements that went by really fast, like a 30 second ad in 1 second. They showed this guy watching them, puffing up, and exploding, because his nervous system went into overload or something. Anyway, it was kind of like living through a blipvert. All these experiences rushed at me, really fast, like time sped way the hell up or something. But it was super intense. It was like reality's volume had been turned up to 11.

JEANETTE

Wow. That sounds crazy.

NIGEL

Hey now, I don't think it was crazy, it was just some kind of weird time effect.

JEANETTE

Oh! I didn't mean like you were going crazy, I just meant it was like a freaky experience or something.

NIGEL

Yeah, that's definitely what it was. A freaky experience. *[Pause]* So, what's with your whole split personality thing, speaking of crazy?

JEANETTE

What do you mean?

NIGEL

I mean your whole suddenly-competent thing. You went from being a dumb blonde to being in control. That was kinda weird. Kinda hot, but kinda weird.

JEANETTE

Oh, I didn't really do anything.

NIGEL

I thought you did. It was pretty sexy, actually.

JEANETTE

Really? I don't think so. I hate being bossy like that.

NIGEL

There's a difference between being bossy, and being in control. You were definitely in control. Do you think men want you to be a dumb kitten all the time?

JEANETTE

I'm not a dumb kitten. I just get... assertive sometimes, I guess. Other times I'm more like myself.

NIGEL

Well, take it from me, the assertive you is pretty hot. It was like watching a veil drop. Anyway, we can talk about something else if you want.

JEANETTE

Yeah. Have you seen that new movie *Jewel Garden* yet?

NIGEL

No, but I've heard good things...*[Long pause]* Do you really think those guys were from the past? And were those MIB guys really from the future?

JEANETTE

I don't know. Does it really matter? It's not like we can prove it either way.

NIGEL

Well, their stories did kind of check out, at least the guys from the past. There really was a James Moriarty. He really did work on a time machine. Wikipedia seems to think he died in jail two years after Thad said he left, which doesn't explain how he could have spent five years building a new machine then traveling here.

JEANETTE

So, do you think it was all a hoax?

NIGEL

It'd have to be pretty elaborate. And really specific, you know? Like, we're the only people they talked to. It wasn't like some media thing. I haven't seen a thing in any of the New York blogs or papers.

JEANETTE

Why would they go to all that trouble just to prank two people they don't know?

NIGEL

That's the thing. It doesn't make any sense. I'd believe it was a hoax if it was a bit different, but this was a lot of work to go through just to pull the wool over two people's eyes. Actually, you know, it can't have been a hoax. I keep forgetting about that freeze box! That wasn't a hoax, was it? How could it have been?

JEANETTE

If that was a hoax, then you were in on it. You were totally still, like someone had hit your pause button. You didn't even move at all little when they dragged you out. I don't think it was a hoax.

NIGEL

Wow! So they had to have been real! That's... That's astounding. And no one will believe a goddamn word of it. If I tell anyone about this, they're gonna laugh at me like I'm the crazy one.

JEANETTE

Yeah, probably.

NIGEL

So, if they were real, then the guys in suits were probably real, too. I mean, that one had a freeze ray. I've never seen anything like that. The army's working on some kooky shit, but Parul at work would have told me if they'd actually developed a working freeze ray—he follows military tech news like a fiend, and is always forwarding Danger Room links to the team. There's only so many times you can read about the “superior ballistics of a new Personal Defense Weapon round” or the “surprisingly effective new microwave-based pain ray weapons” before the news goes a bit stale, you know?

JEANETTE

I have no idea what that means.

NIGEL

No, I suppose you wouldn't. I wouldn't either except for Parul's emails. Anyway. That means we've met people who traveled in time to get here. From the past and the future. Who would have thought they'd invent time travel in the 1800s? They barely had science! And what was he always going on about? Ether water or something? Can't have been real. But it worked. *[Pause]* Dammit!

JEANETTE

What?

NIGEL

Oh, the whole thing is just so weird! We met time travelers, but I've never heard of it being a real thing before. If we met time travelers, there must be others around, and...

JEANETTE

And what? Why are you looking at me like that?

NIGEL

I think we could become time travelers.

JEANETTE

What? How? You don't know the first thing about time travel!

NIGEL

No! We could! Oh my God, we could totally travel in time! This could be amazing! Just think! Who have you always wanted to meet from the past? We could talk to Napoleon, or, or, Caesar, or Ghandi, or Einstein! Hell, we could go back and talk to Thad and Professor Crazypants!

JEANETTE

What are you talking about? How can we possibly travel in time? Did you steal one of the gizmos from the MIB dudes, or something?

NIGEL

No! But I know where two very surprised time travelers left their time machines.

Blackout.

SCENE

Lights up on a courtroom scene.

There is an empty bench where the JUDGE will shortly appear. The LAWYER, THAD and MORIARTY sit at the defense table, and the PROSECUTOR sits at the other table. A BAILIFF stands to one side. The only obvious indication that the year is 100+ years in the future is that the BAILIFF is armed with what is obviously a raygun.

BAILIFF

All rise! The honorable Judge McCarthy presiding.

Everyone stands, and the JUDGE enters to sit behind her bench. The JUDGE should be older.

JUDGE

Thanks, everyone, take a seat. Now, Thaddeus, James, you're not from our time, and so things may be a bit different from what you're used to. Your attorney is a skilled professional, and I suggest you leave everything to her. John, whatta we got?

PROSECUTOR

Drunken Skipping, yeronner. Resisting arrest. Willful discharge of a deadly weapon. Ignorance of the laws is no excuse.

JUDGE

Thanks John, I know the rules here. What are you asking for?

PROSECUTOR

We're willing to forego time exile, but we want life in prison, mandatory temporal reclamation service, parole after 20.

LAWYER

Yeronner, my client is 72 years old, with 1880 era healthcare. He might be dead in 5 years, who knows what he may have that we can't cure.

PROSECUTOR

C'mon Meg, what do you think life in prison means?

JUDGE

Quit it, you two. It's a reasonable request. Skipping without a license and approved paperwork is a serious offense, and as John rightly pointed out, ignorance is no excuse. Ok Meg, what do you have to say?

LAWYER

Granted, Skipping without a license, yeronner. James here invented a time travel device in 1880, timeline referred to as A in the documents I've submitted. He obviously didn't know about Skipping regulations, as time travel wouldn't become a recognized branch of science for nearly 200 years at that point, on that timeline progression. Thaddeus was the first to Skip, and James followed him some years later. With extenuating circumstances and defendant's ignorance of Skipping regulations, I move to dismiss the charges due to absence of criminal intent. Defendants to be returned to their time and Skip-related memories wiped. We would be willing to accept implant-based suppression of further temporal activities.

MORIARTY

What? I'm not having one of them things put into my head!

JUDGE

James, you remember what I said at the top of this thing? I strongly recommend you keep quiet and listen to your attorney.

MORIARTY

This young woman is not acting in our best interests! I never agreed to accept this kind of punishment!

JUDGE

Meg?

LAWYER

Look, James... Professor Moriarty. Just sit down, and let me handle this, ok? Trust me, what I'm asking for is so much better than the alternative.

MORIARTY sits, but reluctantly.

JUDGE

What do you think about John's request? He's already being pretty lenient in his requested sentence. You remember the Toulouse affair.

LAWYER

Yeronner, the UNCTA regulations wouldn't be established for almost 200 years from my client's point of view.

JUDGE

[Sighs] Meg, you really wanna go over this ground again? That's not a valid defense, and you know it.

LAWYER

It may not be a valid defense, but it is a valid mitigating circumstance.

PROSECUTOR

And my requested sentence reflects that. I didn't ask for time exile, after all.

JUDGE

Let's leave the subject of sentencing for the moment. James, Thaddeus, here's the deal. You got caught Skipping without a license. The United Nations Commission on Temporal Activities has defined that behavior as illegal, punishable by as much as temporal exile, which is more or less a death sentence. We don't do minimum sentences by law any more, so you're in luck there—I could decide to sentence you to time served and call it good. I probably won't, but that's something we'll figure out later, after all the evidence is in. Now, I know that to your minds, this must seem pretty harsh for what you probably thought was an innocent activity—

MORIARTY

I should say so! To be throttled in the pursuit of science is—

JUDGE

Don't interrupt, I was talking. The reason this activity carries such a heavy penalty is that time travel, which we now colloquially call Skipping, has the potential for a great many dramatic effects upon the continuity of a timeline. Now, you might think that the fact of timelines alleviates a lot of the responsibility for this kind of change, but you'd be wrong. This is an incredibly simplistic explanation, but nature tends to get upset when we create more timelines than we're supposed to. This shows up in timelines suddenly collapsing, taking whole realities with them. There's worse too, but that's bad enough for now. For this reason, Skippers have to be carefully screened and licensed, and their Skip plans thoroughly reviewed and approved.

MORIARTY

This is all rather severe, your honor! We had no intention of causing any harm! My work on aetheric fluid theory and the resulting time travel machine were the work of *science*, not the madcap adventures of a hooligan!

JUDGE

Doesn't matter. You should know, as a scientist, that sometimes experiments go wrong. Usually they don't go so wrong that reality is destroyed, right? Well, your experiments could have ended up that way. Anyway, this concludes our preliminary hearing, we'll set a date for the trial, and I'll see you boys in a couple of weeks.

Lights fade down.

SCENE

Lights fade up on NIGEL and JEANETTE, who are sitting, surrounded by an array of stuff, such as one might do when packing for a trip. The stuff includes clothes, food, camping gear, etc.

NIGEL

Did you get the bear spray?

JEANETTE

Crap! I knew I forgot something. We can pick it up tonight. It's not like there's a deadline.

NIGEL

Too true! Man, this is gonna be so cool! Where's that list?

JEANETTE picks up a piece of paper and hands it to NIGEL, who reads from it.

NIGEL

We gotta put these in order. [Research proper dates here] 1880, London, Thad and Professor Crazy. 25 AD, Jerusalem, Jesus. 1000 BC, Egypt, building of the pyramids. A couple million BC, dinosaurs. 1066, England, Norman invasion. 1604, England, meet Shakespeare. Oh, we gotta add "meet Cleopatra" to the Egypt trip, I wanna know if she's really as hot as everybody says.

JEANETTE

My god, do you have to be so stereotypical, Nigel? I don't want to waste this opportunity on a glorified titty bar—

NIGEL

Oh, hey! Speaking of that, we should totally check out an orgy in Rome. *[He scribbles on the list]*

JEANETTE

[Sighs] Fine, whatever. If I'm driving, that's not where we're going.

NIGEL

Oh, and King Arthur! And Robin Hood! This is gonna be so cool!

JEANETTE

You wanna meet Ali Baba and his 40 thieves as well?

NIGEL

Nah, too sweaty. Anyway, they'd probably skewer us and loot our bodies.

JEANETTE

What do you think Cleopatra's guards would do, then? We're gonna have to be careful with this, Nigel, we could get into a lot of trouble.

NIGEL

I'm sure we'll figure it out, no problem.

JEANETTE

Uh-huh. You speak Aramaic?

NIGEL

What?

JEANETTE

That's the language Jesus spoke. It's not like we're going to go back to 25 AD and find a bunch of English speakers. I don't think English even existed until the 1500s.

NIGEL

Bullshit. What do you think they spoke in England? English, duh.

JEANETTE

I'm just saying, we should probably do some research on some of these things. 1880 London is fine, but those other places sound more or less crazy. I mean, what if we get to the Jurassic era and are immediately eaten by some huge dinosaur?

NIGEL

I got it covered! I told you, we're bringing bear spray! And I've got a buddy at work who said he'd loan me a shotgun if I wanted to go hunting. I'll just tell him I'm gonna try a little wild bird hunting, and presto, instant dinosaur deterrent.

JEANETTE

I can't believe I'm having this conversation. And I can't believe I know more about this than you do. You know that shotguns don't work on big animals, right?

NIGEL

What are you talking about? Shotguns totally destroy things. I've seen it happen. You can't tell me *Army of Darkness* didn't teach you a thing or two about shotguns!

JEANETTE

Nigel! That was a movie! What did you tell me about hacker movies?

NIGEL

Aw, c'mon. Just because Hollywood gets hackers wrong doesn't mean they get guns wrong. Everyone knows about guns, but hackers are totally misunderstood.

JEANETTE

Fine, whatever. If you get us killed, I'm totally kicking your ass when we get to heaven.

Lights fade down.

SCENE

Lights fade up on the courtroom scene.

Court has been in session for a while.

PROSECUTOR

Prosecution calls Steny Johansson.

STENY gets into the witness box.

BAILIFF

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

STENY

Yes.

PROSECUTOR

Now, Steny, could you tell us what you do for a living?

STENY

I'm a technical consultant for the UN Commission on Temporal Activities.

PROSECUTOR

And what does that entail, usually?

STENY

Well, I'm an expert in the field of temporal dynamics, so I end up dealing with the temporal dynamics questions that come up as part of the approval process for temporal displacement plan requests. We usually call them Skip plans.

PROSECUTOR

And could you tell us what exactly "temporal dynamics" means?

STENY

Yes, temporal dynamics is the study of movement through time, including the physical theories, such as dimensional instability generation and electrotemporal propulsion, as well as the mechanics of how we actually implement those theories in practice.

PROSECUTOR

Good, and have you had an opportunity to study time travel device built by James Moriarty?

STENY

I have, although only plans, not the physical device itself.

PROSECUTOR

Why haven't you been able to study the device itself?

STENY

Retrieval of the device from 2010 was deemed to be a non-critical use of temporal resources, and my Skip plan was not approved.

PROSECUTOR

Very well, and what did your study of the plans reveal to you?

STENY

It's a fascinating thing, certainly. James was able to come up with what I'm told is a functional Skipping machine, with access to none of the technology we currently understand as being necessary for the effort. It's quite remarkable that it works, and I can't honestly say I really understand the principles it works on.

MORIARTY

Your theories are bunk! I had perfectly adequate access to the "necessary technology," thank you very much! My machine is entirely functional without any of your insanity!

JUDGE

James, pipe down. You do that any more, and I'll find you in contempt, ok?

MORIARTY grumbles and sits down without saying anything more.

JUDGE

Please continue.

PROSECUTOR

So, Steny, you're saying that this machine couldn't work?

STENY

Oh, no, I wouldn't say that. It definitely *could* work, it's just surprising that it does, and that James was able to come up with a functional device given the technology and science at his disposal.

PROSECUTOR

Can you say for certain that James's device did or didn't work?

STENY

Well, no. I guess I can't say for certain. The technology he used is completely unknown to me, but based on what I do understand of it, it's certainly possible that it worked as described. One thing which gives me pause is that I heard somewhere that this machine is capable of very short Skips, on the order of minutes, which is of course impossible.

MORIARTY

Balderdash! You know not whereof you speak, charlatan!

JUDGE

James! Lance, please restrain James Moriarty to his seat.

The BAILIFF does something to the seat.

SFX: sound indicating a force field has been activated (possibly a rising whine like a camera flash powering up).

MORIARTY looks shocked, and struggles, but can't move from his position.

MORIARTY

This is absolutely mortifying! Release me at once! Is this your distorted future conception of hospitality?

JUDGE

If you keep it up, I'll put your mouth under restraint as well, and that's considerably less pleasant. Please do not interrupt again.

STENY

Actually, yeronner, if his machine really is capable of Skipping with to-the-minute precision, I'd like to know about it. Our most precise Skip technology is only capable of getting us to within a few hours of our intended target time.

JUDGE

I know, but this is not the time for that discussion, Steny. Why don't you talk to James once we're out of session. Any further questions, John?

PROSECUTOR

No, I'm done.

JUDGE

Meg, you have anything for Steny?

LAWYER

Um, no, I think I'm good.

Fade down lights.

SCENE

Fade up lights on the basement room, with two time machines. The first time machine has been repaired with fairly obvious kludgery.

NIGEL and JEANETTE stand looking at the two machines, bulky backpacks on their backs.

NIGEL

Well, you ready to do this thing?

JEANETTE

I guess so. You're not worried about time cops coming to get us or anything?

NIGEL

Nah, they'll never know. I think they saw Professor McSmarty wandering around looking like a throwback from a Civil War re-enactment, and followed him.

JEANETTE

I wish I could be as sure of that as you are.

Lights out.

SCENE

Lights up on the courtroom.

JUDGE

James Moriarty and Thaddeus Gregson, the United Nations Commission on Temporal Activies finds you guilty of temporal displacement without a license and temporal displacement without an approved plan, ameliorated by absence of criminal intent on both charges. The Commission finds you not guilty of temporal displacement while under the influence and assault upon a Commission officer.

MORIARTY

This is an absolute travesty of justice!

THAD (simultaneously with MORIARTY)

Oh my! How can this be!? My wife!

JUDGE

Now, calm down. Sentencing comes next, and we'll have that hearing in a week. Don't go killing yourselves or anything.

Lights down.

SCENE

Lights up on the Professor's workshop from the flashback scene.

MORIARTY and THAD are working at their respective benches. The time machine is conspicuously absent. After a moment of calm work, NIGEL and JEANETTE burst in with their backpacks on.

NIGEL

Hey guys, did you miss us?

JEANETTE

Wow, I can't believe it really worked.

MORIARTY

I'm sorry, who are you, pray?

THAD

Professor, who are these people?

AGENT 147 and AGENT 233 burst in with their freeze rays at the ready.

AGENT 147

Well well, we meet again!

Blackout.

END