

# The Timekeeper

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# Chapter One

## *The Beginning*

The air is fresh and clean, like it used to be a thousand years ago, before pollution, before cars, buses, and airplanes crowded the streets and skies. I see the sky, the sun, and the clouds.

*Wait!* A flash of light and a vision of a strange looking old man, and it was all gone in an instant.

I hear my alarm, wake up, and find myself in my bed. That is, surrounded by my little bedroom, surrounded by my little house in the middle of Frederick, Maryland.

Getting up, I walk over to my bathroom, brush my teeth, then gargle with mouthwash. That finished, I start to dress—casual, yet smart. Since I am a scientist, it really doesn't matter what I look like.

Walking downstairs, I pass my living and dining room and walk into my kitchen where coffee is waiting for me. Drinking, I begin to enjoy the paper, reading an article about the follies of George Bush, about the war in Iraq, a war that did not need to happen. There were no weapons of mass destruction, and we should not have attacked a country that did not attack us. All those soldiers fighting for their country, where they're dying and being crippled.

I turn the page and start reading about health care. The system seems to work if you are disabled, or take in a very small pay check...or a very large one. Even then, the system might not work, but Americans do not realize that there are modern countries where everybody has health care and medicine is affordable. Americans would rather pay fewer taxes than get the services they all deserve—like health care.

I turn the page again and pick up my coffee for a last sip before leaving my house. I walk out of the door and head to the driveway, enjoying the nice springtime weather along the way.

Getting into my car, I start the engine and drive down the street, out of the development of small houses I live in, to the outskirts of Frederick, to the place where I work. A military installation that works on biological weaponry called Fort Dietrich.

Driving through the gate, I flash my I.D. as I pass the security guard, and enter the facility, where I find a parking space reserved for me. I park my little three-door Toyota Yaris, step out of the car and walk to the

entrance of my building where I work as a weapons designer. I enter, go through the usual security checks: photo I.D., retinal scan, and hand print, and take the elevator down to Security Level Four. Entering through the door, I meet my assistant, Jill.

“Hello, Jill. How are you today?”

“Great Dave.”

“How’s the baby?”

“Just fine, another month and it will be a beautiful baby. Dave, can I speak to you in private?”

“Sure.”

She walks into a closed room off to the side of my office.

“What is it.? I can see something is bothering you.”

“I have great reservations about what we’re doing here.”

“Why?”

“This can be turned into a horrible weapon. Once released, it cannot be stopped, and could kill millions.”

“It’s just cellular transmutation, Jill.”

“I know, that’s what scares me. What you’re doing...” Jill continues, “is creating cells that can be attached to viruses of any kind. Then they can be transmuted through containment—walls, steel, any material known to man.”

“I know, but the idea is to develop a containment field first so that it can be contained.”

“But suppose someone were to use it on their own, attaching deadly viruses to the transmitted cells. Once released, it could spread, and nothing could stop it.”

“But, that’s why we have a containment field. Remember, experimentation is the pathway to discovery.”

“Who’s funding this nightmare anyway?”

“I have a backer, a senator who delegates money in my direction for the project. He keeps it hushed up, And only he knows where the money is going. Well, I have to go to work. Goodbye Jill.”

“Goodbye, Dave.”

I leave through my door and walk into my lab, where I begin to work.

At the end of the day, I get ready to leave.

“See you later, Jill.”

“Goodbye, Dave.”

I walk out of the security facility and get into my car. While driving back home, I start to think about what Jill said. “Ah, so what,” I say to myself. “That senator is funding it, so it must be okay.”

When I arrive home, I drive up my driveway, park my car and go into my house.

I sit down in front of the T.V. and start to watch. Eventually I get bored with my program and get up to make a phone call. I dial my friend John’s number, an elderly scientist I know.

“Hello, John. Is the dinner still on?”

“Sure it is. Everyone’s going to be here. I’ve got a regular smorgasbord of people coming—Muslims, Christians, Jewish people, Democrats and Republicans.”

“Can I bring the papers over?”

“Sure, but why bring them to me?”

“Because there’s no one else, and I can’t find anyone who can help me with this cellular transmutation thing.”

“Okay, I’ll see if I can help you.”

“See you later,” I say, and hang up.

John is an old professor of mine from my college days, a brilliant man in his own right. I was working on my doctoral thesis at the University of Pennsylvania in biology when I first met him, my second doctoral, after the one I had acquired earlier in physics at the University of Maryland. Which is why I’m perfectly suited for this cellular transmutation thing.

I stop thinking and finish dressing for dinner, take my keys and go to my car.

The drive to Rockville, Maryland, where John lives, is not that far from Frederick. I soon pull up the driveway to John’s place, a mansion set on two acres of a beautifully wooded area. I get out of my car, walk to the house and knock on the door.

# Chapter Two

## *The Dinner*

The door opens, and I see John standing there looking at me.

“Hello, John.”

“Hello, Dave.”

“You’re here a little early.”

John walks me to his office, where we both sit down.

“So what seems to be the problem?”

I reach into my briefcase and pull out a bunch of papers with equations written all over them. “The problem is, I can’t get these final equations to work.”

“I see, taking the papers and pulling on his grey beard. John’s a man of small stature, but superior intellect. “Well, Dave, I can help you, but I won’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re dealing with something here that can be turned into a terrible weapon.”

“That’s the second time today somebody said that to me,” I reply in anger.

“Too bad, Dave. I won’t help you, and that’s that.”

“Okay, then I’ll have to go to Jack.”

“How is Jack anyway?”

“He’s doing great—now that he’s inherited all his family’s money.”

I start thinking to myself, *I’ve known Jack since college. He’s really self-taught in every area of science, a brilliant man, but he has schizophrenia, and has had it since he was a young man. He manages to control it with medication.*

“Dave, Dave, oh, Dave!”

I wake up out of my thoughts and see John staring at me.

John continues, “You see, Dave...you see these books?” He pulls a couple of books off the shelf. “They are my favorites—Stephen Crane’s

*The Open Boat* and these here—Edger Allen Poe’s *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven*. They’re beauty, sheer beauty and poetry. It took genius to create them. They accomplish something. What you’re doing...your little project accomplishes nothing—except possibly bringing an end to this world of ours.”

“But, that’s what I do. That’s what I studied all those years for.”

“Dave, do me—and yourself—a favor. Give up the project, and put your brilliant mind toward something that achieves something...something that lasts and contributes something to mankind. Like these books here—not something that will destroy it. It’s time for dinner, Dave. Let’s go meet our guests.”

With that, we both get up and walk over to the hallway.

The first guest to enter is Reverend Paul, a pastor of John’s. Not mine, of course—I was born Jewish.

John speaks first. “Hello, Reverend.”

“Hello, John. Hello, Dave” and shakes both our hands.

The second to enter is Sheik Mohammad Abdullah Osmond, an Arab Muslim by birth. He comes in and says, “Hello.”

The next is Bill, a neighbor, who is a devout Democrat.

The last to enter is the senator himself, the one who is funding my weapons design—Senator Bob Ross.

“Pleased to meet you,” he says as he enters, and gives me a little wink as he passes by.

We all assemble in the dining room and sit down. We enjoy our dinner with very little conversation. When we are finished, we all sit drinking our coffee.

John turns and says to Muhammad, “Well, my friend, how’s the Arab situation?”

“Not good,” the sheik replies. “The war in Iraq has caused a lot of hardship and death. Not only for my people, but for the many Americans who are fighting there for their country, and all because of George Bush’s useless and wasted war.”

“I take exception to that. We haven’t had an attack on our soil since 9/11,” the senator replies.

“That’s not because of George Bush, Senator.”

“Okay,” John breaks in, “that’s enough bickering at the table.” He turns to Bill. “So what’s happening with the Democrats?”

“Not much,” Bill replies “We’re still in a situation where millions of Americans do not have any health care.” He continues, “We’re one of the only modern countries that do not have health care for everyone.”

The senator grunts a bit, and Bill continues, “It’s fine if you’re a congressman, senator, or president, because they all have health care, but if you’re without it, and if you get sick or injured, you are out of luck.”

“Recently,” Bill continues, “I had a friend who had a bowel obstruction. It ended up costing one hundred thousand dollars for his stay at the hospital—and that’s no exaggeration. If you’re lucky, you have insurance, and if you don’t, you hope they treat you. And even if they do treat you, when you get the bill, you either blow your head off with a shotgun, or try to declare bankruptcy.”

The senator wakes up out of his trance. “I think you got it all wrong,” he says. “A lot of people have health care.”

“Not enough,” Bill replies.

“Yes, but...” the senator continues, “Americans want to pay fewer taxes.”

“But, Senator, they don’t realize that the Europeans and others pay more taxes, but everybody is taken care of. It’s not funny to get sick or need medication and not be able to afford it—which millions of Americans can’t.”

The senator grunts a bit, and takes a puff of his cigar. “Well, we’ll see,” the senator says.

Then Bill the Democrat continues. “The only way we will have health care for everybody is for a Democrat to take office. And even then the Republican Congress will try to block legislation the President tries to put through. Bill Clinton was in the White House for eight years and tried to get health care for Americans in the beginning of his presidency. But, all he did was have a famous affair that only caused himself and other Americans shame—and we have been paying for it ever since. The right-wingers all vote for Republicans because they think they’re more religious and moral than Democrats. Which, by the way, is absolutely not true. And, all the Republicans turn out to be a bunch of hypocrites in the end anyway.”

John, sitting at the end of the table, interrupts, “Reverend Paul, what do you think?”

“I think it’s true that most people feel that Republicans are more moral, but I feel that we’re all the same. We all want to be safe, happy and healthy.”

Muhammad starts in. “The problem is that you Americans...which I’m one of, by the way...that you Americans have a democratic society, and you have too many freedoms.”

“But...” John continues, “Muhammad, that’s what this country was built on—freedom for everybody.”

“But that allows dissent, John. With your freedom, you have pornography and all kinds of vice. You see, we believe, in our country, in one religion, in one God, and everyone must follow.”

“Muhammad, isn’t it better to have more freedoms like our founding fathers wanted us to have?” John asks.

“It may be good for you, but I believe you have too many freedoms.”

The senator grunts again, and takes a puff of his cigar.

With that the dinner is over.

We all leave in our cars, and I drive back to Frederick and get into my comfortable sofa chair and pop in a DVD: “Jurassic Park,” by Stephen Spielberg.

# Chapter Three

## *The Dream*

I begin to watch, and start to get bored. I've seen this movie a hundred times. I fall asleep.

Dreaming, I start to think about this world and what we are doing to it—pollution and all the environmental changes that are taking place on our planet—and all driven by greed. *After all*, I think to myself, *we're only caretakers of this world*. I can't believe that the creation of heart and mind was a biological accident. God created this world, and we were put here to take care of it.

I start to think about science and all the improvements in technology we have. Medicine, personal convenience—they're all improved—but at what cost? I start to think of the great scientists of the past—Newton, Einstein—brilliant men who laid the foundation of all the technology we have today.

Then I start to think of my own research, cellular transmutation. Could it be turned into a dreadful weapon? I think those great scientists of the past would turn in their graves if they saw what I was doing. *Containment*, I think to myself.

Waking up in my chair, I see that "Jurassic Park" is still on, and I hear Jeff Goldblum say, "...they were so busy thinking whether they could, they forgot to ask if they should."

And, with that I turn off the TV and go to bed.

# Chapter Four

## *The Next Day*

My drive to work seems longer than usual today, and I start to think about my work again. *Should I really be doing this? Like Jill said, it could be turned into a dreadful weapon.*

Pulling up to my parking spot, I notice that there are a lot of people here today. I guess it's because it's Friday. Getting out of my car, I go in and pass through all the security checks along the way, and walk into my office.

"Hello, Jill."

"Hello, Dave. Going to see Jack today?"

"Yes, right after work."

"How is Jack these days?" Jill asks.

"He's doing fine. His schizophrenia is controlled with medication."

"You know, he's one of the most brilliant men I know."

"I know, Jill."

"I want to ask you something."

"Go ahead."

"It's just that with this baby I'm going to have, and thinking about what's going on in the world...with terrorism and everything. This research we're doing...it could have grave implications."

"I know. I was thinking the same thing myself."

Finally, Jill finishes, and says. "Swell. That's all I wanted to say," and leaves the room.

Sitting down at my desk, I start to work on my project. Looking at the computer screen, I keep trying to figure out the solution to my problem. Over and over again, I enter the equations. *They just do not work*, I keep saying to myself.

Finally, I give up and just sit there looking at the screen, and say out loud, "Maybe Jack can help me. John sure as hell won't."

Unknown to me, Jill is in the next room and picks up the phone.

She starts, "Hello. Is this the Washington Post?"

A man is on the opposite line, and answers, "Yes, it is."

Jill continues, "I have an important story for one of your journalists."

"Hold on," is the reply as the man switches her to the press room.

*Dave's going to kill me*, she says to herself as she waits.

The operator gives her Dick Harris, a journalist who's been with the paper ten years.

Jill greets him with a big "Hello."

"Hello," he replies. "This is Dick Harris. What can I do for you?"

"I have a story for you," Jill says, and proceeds to tell him of all the work that she and Dave are working on.

When she's finished, the journalist hangs up the phone. Thinking to himself, he says, *This is a nightmare waiting to happen*.

The next call Mr. Harris makes is to the senator funding the project. Luckily, Jill gave his name in their conversation.

"Hello. Is this the senator's office?"

"Yes, it is. What can I do for you?"

Dick starts to talk about the project.

"I know nothing about it, but I'll let the senator know you called," and she hangs up. Writing a memo, she lays out her phone call with the journalist. She walks into the senator's office, who is out to lunch, drops the memo on his desk, leaves the room and returns to hers.

# Chapter Five

## *Jack's Place*

The drive to Jack's place, located in Virginia, is a long one for me. During the whole trip I keep thinking about my work and those damn equations needed to complete my project.

"Well, I hope Jack can help me," I say aloud.

I drive up the driveway to Jack's place, a large mansion on the outskirts of Alexandria, park my car and get out. Looking at the house, I say aloud. "What a place."

It is a large mansion that Jack inherited from his parents when they passed away a few years ago. He got all their money too. It all funds the science projects he keeps busy with.

Walking up to the door, I ring the bell. The door swings open and I see Jack standing there gazing down at me.

"How are you, Jack?"

"I'm fine, Dave. How are you?" and I walk in.

"What's the problem? I heard you can't get your stuff to work."

"That's right. I just can't get the last equations to work right."

"Well, let me see it."

As I proceed to hand Jack my papers, he glances over them, and then we walk further into his house. Jack takes me to his research lab.

"What are you working on this time?"

"Take a look at this."

Jack shows me his latest project, a large computer screen hooked up to at least three massive mainframe computers, which are also hooked up to some strange looking pieces of equipment.

"You see what this does?" and Jack turns toward the computer screen. "A genetic sample is taken from an early developing fetus, and the DNA is inserted into that machine over there. The program is then started, and you start entering all the characteristics you want for your unborn child—blue

eyes, high I.Q., tall with brown hair, anything you want. The DNA is then reinserted into the growing fetus.”

“That’s incredible, Jack. Does it work?”

“Well, nearly. I’m still working on it.”

“But…” Dave continues, “should we be messing with nature? Don’t you realize the implications of what you’re doing here? We’re not God, you know.”

“But research is research, and scientists have been doing it for thousands of years.”

“Well, maybe we should think twice before doing something that’s going to affect humanity in such a profound way.” Saying this, I shudder and almost start choking on my own words. Am I not doing the same thing?

“Dave, Dave, I say, Dave. Are you there?” Jack asks.

I wake up out of my thoughts. “Yes, I’m here. I was just thinking.”

“Look over here. You want to see another one of my little projects?”

“Sure.”

Turning around, Jack picks up this strange looking device made of metal and some kind of plastic.

“You see, you implant this device into the correct area of the human brain. After implantation, a person can hook up to a central network, and, with a thought, download whatever information required, or communicate with whomever you care to. It’s just a takeoff on cell phones and the internet, which people are so fond of these days. You know, the phones people use while shopping, or while they’re driving and should be paying attention to the road.”

“That’s incredible. These devices are all incredible, but they raise a lot of ethical questions. I hope my children, if I ever have any, don’t program what their children will be or plug their brain into the internet.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Jack replies. “But progress is progress.”

“That’s kind of careless.”

“Maybe, but that’s just the way it is. Or, should I say, the way it’s going to be.”

“Well, I hope I never see it in my lifetime.”

“Who knows, Dave, you might. Anyway, I’ll look at these equations for you and see what I can do.”

With that, I leave the house, get into my car and drive home.

I get into my bed for the night, restlessly thinking of my project, and finally go to sleep.

## Chapter Six

### *Meeting the Timekeeper*

Startled, I wake up, only to find myself not in my comfortable bed, but on a beach somewhere.

I look around. The waves are rolling in, and there's nothing but ocean. I turn and look toward land and see a hill and a sign with an arrow on it. Written on it are some words.

I step closer and see that it says: *THIS WAY*. I turn and see a little dirt path turning up toward the hill. Following the sign, I find myself walking up the hill. I come to another sign. Again, it says: *THIS WAY*.

Eventually, I come to a little cottage. There is no doorknob on the door, but there is a knocker. Knocking three times, I wait for a reply. The door swings open, and standing there is a little frail-looking old man.

*I remember this man, I say to myself. He's the man in my dreams.*

"Hello, Dave."

"Hello. Who are you, and what am I doing here?"

"I brought you here, Dave. I'm the Timekeeper."

"The Timekeeper?"

"Yes, I watch mankind through time."

"Where are you from, Mr. Timekeeper?"

"Oh, I'm from here, there, and nowhere. I'm from the past and the future."

"Are you God?"

He laughs. "No, I'm not God. I'm just a scientist like you, Dave. I built this place myself. Come in, I want to show you something."

He takes me in, and we walk down a long hallway. Turning to the right, we walk into a room with a long corridor running down the middle. On the sides there are visual panels, with moving images on them.

Moving down the corridor with the old man, I take a closer look at the panels. At the beginning, I see civilizations beginning, farms and rivers, and men toiling in the fields. Further down the corridor I begin to see history

unfolding—wars and men, cities being built, and being destroyed. Finally, I come near the end and look at the last panel. I see devastation and emptiness—no men, no nothing.

“This is what I brought you here for. You see, this is the future, thanks to you.”

“Thanks to me?”

“Yes, thanks to you. This is what is going to happen if you continue your project. It gets into the wrong hands and destroys our little world.”

Standing there, I am speechless.

“Yes,” the old man continues, “I’ve watched mankind from the beginning. I’ve watched mankind and all their follies, their wars, their destruction of the environment, death, life, and everything in between.”

“So what do I do?” I say to the old man.

“Stop your research. Destroy all your material, and put your brilliant mind toward something useful to mankind. I’ve watched many scientists—brilliant men who laid the foundation of all we have today, but they were not thinking of the consequences of what they were doing. Then men like you came along, building on their brilliance, again without thinking of the consequences of what they were doing. I’ve watched the world that God gave us turn from a beautiful paradise into a slum, with pollution and destruction of the environment. I’ve seen it all. Yes, there are improvements. Things are easier, health is better, conveniences are there, but at what cost?”

“I’ll do what you say,” I reply.

“Good. That’s what I wanted to hear.”

With that, he gives me a little gold medallion with a clock embossed on it.

“Something to remember me by,” he says.

Waking up, I find myself in my bed. I look over the sheets and can see my room. I wonder, *Was it all a dream? It all seemed so real. It must have been a dream.* Turning, I feel something touching my side and pick it up. It’s a little gold medallion with a clock on it.

“My God!” I say aloud. “It was not a dream at all!”

Getting up, I go to work. I see Jill standing there with a newspaper in her hand.

“Hello, Jill. What’s that?”

“I’m sorry, I had to do it.” and hands me the paper.

On the front page it reads: "SENATOR LINKED TO DANGEROUS SCIENCE PROJECT."

"I don't care. I am going to end all this anyway."

I walk over to my computer and destroy all the files, all my years of research—I destroy all of it.

"Good, you finally came to your senses."

"Thanks, Jill, I think I finally have."

# Epilogue

Talking to John, my good friend John, I begin to say, “I destroyed all of it, John. All those years of work, and I’m glad I did it. I tell you, it was all real. I have the medallion to prove it.”

“Maybe it was.”

“John, I am still worried about something.”

“Worried about what?”

“All the material and work were not confined just to my computer. Other scientists around the world were sharing in my research. The material is out there, and they can build on it and do what the Timekeeper foretold.”

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t worry about it. It’s out of your hands now.” With that, John says, “Remember, Dave, to err is human, and to forgive divine. Maybe God will forgive you in time.”

With that, this story ends...

