

Reenactment

I had just finished my sparse meal of cherries and water when I caught him staring at me again, except this time he didn't glance away. I forced myself to look nonchalant and shifted my attention to the front lines. Smoke drifted listlessly from the fields off in the distance and I could hear the rattle of wagons as they brought supplies up from the rear. From my position on Little Round Top, I could survey the entire scene of the upcoming battle. The tree lines below me rustled with butternut and gray as Rebel troops moved into position for another attack: one that would be coming in exactly two hours and forty-seven minutes. I hacked another dry cough into the dust. I don't think I've ever been so miserable in my life. Ever since I arrived almost two days ago, it has been nothing but heat, wild rain, and dust. I had to resist looking at my wrist in anticipation; Civil War soldiers might have pocket watches, but they didn't wear wristwatches.

The up tick in action diverted my attention to the right. The tempo of shouting coincided with the roar of cannon as another charge was taking place well out of my line of sight. It was a Confederate assault north of Culp's Hill and one I would have liked to participate in, but I couldn't be in two places at once and the main action was going to take place soon: here at Little Round Top. And then I again met eyes with that strange Union soldier, but now there were two others with him, all studying me and animatedly talking to each other.

I had arrived two nights ago at a position four miles west of the main line of the Northern Army's march. I had walked the distance to the advancing reinforcements coming up from the southeast. It was easy to blend in with the rag-tag group of mutineers from the Second Maine. I had been asked where I was from by two different officers from the Twentieth Maine. "The Sixteenth Michigan," I had responded. "I got separated from my unit back past Littlestown." Both times, the officers had just nodded and said, "You're with us now. We're moving up to engage the Rebs." They had then ridden off to organize other stragglers coming in from all directions.

I felt reasonably comfortable in my guise. I knew the Sixteenth Michigan Regiment was somewhere behind us, but in this confusion there was little likelihood of meeting up with any of its members. And since I had lived my whole life in Detroit, it had been easy to go to the Wayne County Historical Society to research the details of Michigan in the 1860s. And what I didn't know, I could easily fake. Most soldiers of this period were not well traveled or widely educated.

But I did have to be careful in my speech for the language here was not as clear or straightforward as in my time. It was English, but spoken in a more elaborate manner than I felt comfortable mimicking. I solved that problem by using simple phrases and grunts, implying to others I was simple: not an uncommon trait in the Army of the Potomac. Little would any of them appreciate that I was a scientist from the twenty-first century.

Detroit Laboratories, my employer, had been involved in time travel research for years, in secret of course. Our work was federally funded and the elected representatives

didn't want the tax-paying public to know their hard earned money was being wasted on this kind of foolishness. But the United States Government, God Bless it, was not going to let any promising research that might bear technological or military fruit go unexplored.

I was the project manager and had a lot of my life invested in this work. Not that I actually did any research in time travel or even believe in it. I'm a physicist by education, but I found out early in my working life that I'm not particularly good at what I had been trained to do. There were too many other scientists who were just plain smarter than I was and the scientific community can be pretty cutthroat and petty. But I was good at playing office politics and getting things done, so I found my calling as a manager, not a researcher. I had arrived at my current position courtesy of a common Board member of Detroit Labs and my previous employer - another technology company that mysteriously went bankrupt despite several profitable products.

When I arrived, research had been progressing on this contract for over four years by the most impressive group of scientists, mathematicians, and materials engineers I've ever seen assembled in one place. They even had some physicists who seemed to understand that voodoo they call quantum mechanics. Did I say progressing? I meant the government was burning off large amounts of cash and the team was getting nowhere. They were organized into discrete and competing task forces – no doubt a brilliant idea of the business wonks in the Detroit Lab bureaucracy. None of the teams were producing any results and my appointment was only for twelve months, so I had to do something quick.

Naturally, I reorganized. I stripped the Gravitational Collapse, Wormhole, and Tachyon Task Forces down to skeletal, basic research teams and beefed up the Tipler Cylinder effort. The materials folks had made some impressive strides in superdense matter engineering and Detroit Labs had an almost infinite amount of power available since developing working fusion reactors (all in secret of course, the anti-nuke crowd still had some political pull). And we had not just fusion, but matter-antimatter fusion – one-hundred-percent energy conversion, not the puny yields from hydrogen. I also set a realistic goal; develop a concrete, feasible proposal to build a working model of a Tipler Cylinder that could send one gram of matter ten minutes back in time. I didn't think even this was really achievable. Although time travel was theoretically possible, like most physicists, I didn't think it would ever be done. The engineering hurdles alone were too daunting. But I might show enough progress to get my contract renewed and this company does pay well. Detroit Labs is also involved in some more practical projects and if I could get transferred over to one of those, my appointment might become a permanent position.

The other problem I had was what to do with the Topology/Quantum Foam Task Force. That group had most of the quantum mechanics jocks and they were so weird that they didn't get along with the others. I didn't want them disrupting the Tipler effort, so I folded them in with the Cosmic String Task Force and stuck them off to the side.

I was more surprised than anyone when one of our approaches actually began to show some promise and, wouldn't you know it, it came from the Cosmic String folks. We were all stunned when they announced they had solved not just one, but two of Einstein's gravitational tensor field equations. I took everyone out to dinner in

celebration and the mood was so festive, you would have thought the Detroit Lions had finally won the Super Bowl. It wasn't long before they succeeded in creating energy strings in close enough proximity to uncover and warp spacetime, revealing four world time lines. Within eight weeks we were sending off micro-recorders on all four.

Sometimes they came back and sometimes they didn't. We couldn't explain that, but the results were exciting and inspired the entire team to work around the clock to perfect our sendoff, as we called them.

Our breakthrough caused a major sensation in the Company and I spent several weeks in meetings briefing the higher-ups on what we had accomplished and what might reasonably be expected going forward. Some of these meetings had a bizarre twist in that many of the officers and government reps had little appreciation for the scientific implications of our work and seemed more interested in how it could be used to make money. One recurring question did keep popping up: when could a human being be sent back in time? I told them that might be years depending on the level of resources devoted to the effort. They all understood and the funding requests began to make their way through the corporate and government bureaucracies. I was also made a Senior Vice-President in the Research Department although I had to sign some draconian non-competes to get my stock options and guaranteed severance package.

Over the next six months, we refined our processes and algorithms such that we were getting back our recorders all the time and we got a clearer picture of what we had. The timelines we revealed could take us anywhere on the planet, or even out into space, but each one included only discrete time increments. By analyzing star patterns and soil samples we found one timeline took us out roughly two million years in the future, while

another took us almost a billion years in the past. We couldn't determine anything with the third timeline, but the fourth was closer to home; it encompassed the years 1859 to 1867.

It wasn't long before my staff began bugging me with the inevitable question: when could a human go? Oh, human testing was verboten I had said with a sad shaking of my head. The senior executives were a bunch of weenies – after all, they weren't scientists or even engineers - and they didn't want to take any chances just yet with humans. What if something went wrong?

Of course, that was all nonsense. I could have blown up the building with everyone in it and the corporate hierarchy wouldn't have said anything as long as I delivered the dramatic results they wanted. And sending a human backward or forward in time was pretty dramatic. But I had to be careful about how I was going to play this.

It came to me that evening as I sat at the bar of my favorite watering hole, the “Gare St.Lazare”. The Gare is a pseudo-French restaurant and I never eat there because I hate French food. But the bar has an interesting deep wood, baroque kind of décor, it's never too crowded or noisy and the bartender is a knockout. She's always friendly enough, but I can never get her interested in anything other than serving me more drinks.

It was right after she had set down my third Bass Ale of the night that it hit me. I should be the first human to go back in time. I could justify it by saying that, as Project Manager, this venture was my responsibility and I couldn't morally risk anyone else's life. And I would be the best person to make the numerous corporate presentations that would follow on what I had seen first hand. Now, it would have to be something interesting to really grab the imagination of the audience. Science was like any other

business in that you had to have some sizzle in order to sell whatever you were trying to push. It was after my fourth Bass that the destination became obvious.

Did I mention that I was a Civil War enthusiast? Everyone has his secret passions apart from work, and ever since eighth grade history class, mine had been the American Civil War. I read every book on the subject I could get my hands on and took my vacations attending conventions of like-minded individuals. I have traveled to every major battlefield numerous times, stood on the now silent hills, and wondered what it must have been like to either face or be a part of a Rebel charge. Ten years ago I began participating in reenactments that were staged for the thousands like myself. I made many good friends at these affairs, but my current project responsibilities didn't leave room for any time off, so I had lately been diverted from my annual trips.

Next spring I planned on traveling to Maryland to participate in a reenactment of the Battle of Antietam. Reenactment, hell! What if I were to witness a real Civil War battle? And why not the most famous Civil War engagement of all: the Battle of Gettysburg? That would certainly make a splash. The thousands of Civil War buffs across the country would go nuts, not to mention the military. And the speaking fees I could command...this was a brilliant idea and deserved another Bass in celebration. I waved for another drink and thought about how I would spring this on my staff.

"You're looking happy tonight." The bartender slid the bottle forward and favored me with a bemused smile. "Got a big weekend planned?"

"Well, it just so happens that we've invented a time machine back at the office and I'm going to go do some sight seeing in the nineteenth century. Wanna come?"

Her smile broadened. “Pretty good. I don’t think I’ve heard that line before.” She nodded at the bottle as she started back down the bar. “That one’s on the house.”

The next morning, I called a meeting of my project staff and delivered my decision. They all took it pretty well; only a few of them snickered as I laid out the details. I’d be placed on the Federal side forty-eight hours before the main action started. I would make my way to one of the columns coming up and integrate with the Twentieth Maine Regiment that would end up at Little Round Top. I didn’t expect any trouble because the Twentieth Maine took in many stragglers from other units on their march and accounting for men and materials in those days was chaotic at best. I would witness the battle, taking images and sound from the micro-recorder I had installed in the third button of my shirt, and slip away during the evening of the third day, after the main action was done. I’d go back from the original set point twelve hours later.

As we went through final preparations, my administrative assistant tried to calm my nerves. “”OK, Jerry, we’re about set to go. Don’t worry; this will be a piece of cake. Just remember you’re only there to observe. Don’t go killing any butterflies; we don’t want you initiating any weird paradoxes.”

The plan was not that well thought out, I’ll admit, and there were considerable risks involved; but the potential payoff was huge.

And here I sit waiting for the charge at Little Round Top to begin. I had avoided conversing with any other Union soldiers for fear of somehow exposing myself as someone who shouldn’t be here. But now I found myself looking at the many faces, mostly boys, who would soon die in one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The thought

that I might die too certainly crossed my mind, but I had ensured a position far to the rear on the downward side of a hill that would take a Confederate flanking attack, which would fall short. And how could I die before I was born? I tried convincing myself that there was nothing to worry about, but as the tempo below me started to increase, I felt a sinking dread in my stomach. And suddenly, I wasn't sure I had made the right decision in coming here. And then there were the four soldiers who were now staring at me. Had I somehow given myself away? I didn't think they would ever suspect I came from the future, but they might think I was a spy.

I looked away, but from my peripheral vision could see that they had all risen and were approaching. I studiously began cleaning my musket and tried to ignore them as they stopped in front of me. Nothing was said for a moment and then I looked up at their faces, fearing the worst.

The first thing that struck me was that the four of them looked like all of the old Civil War photos I had ever seen. They were of diverse heights and shades, wearing loosely fitting uniforms that were torn and rubbed threadbare in almost symmetrical fashion. Their faces betrayed various stages of beards and the coarse acne of the men in that period. One even had his arm in a crude sling. But their eyes were different from the majority of troops I had encountered: purposeful and aware, not the blank, empty stares of battle-weary soldiers. They looked at me thoughtfully and then sat down on the multitudinous rocks.

The one I had first noticed staring at me nodded to the others and spoke. "So, where are you from?"

"The Sixteenth Michigan," I said.

They all smiled and the first man said, “No, what time are you from?”

I must have gaped at them for quite a while for they all started to laugh and motioned for others to come join them. I couldn’t think of how to respond so I stammered, “What do you mean?”

The one to the right cut in, “Well, it’s pretty obvious you’re a time traveler. We’re just curious which time period you came from.”

“Time traveler? I’m...I don’t know what you mean.”

Others were assembling around me although I didn’t sense any hostility. If anything, the mood was becoming lighter.

“Don’t worry. This must be your first time. Relax, we’re all time travelers too.” He motioned to the gathering throng and then held out his hand. “My name is Josh. I’m from the Asian mainland, year 4567. My guess is you’re from the mid twenty-fourth century. Maybe 2350 or so?”

“I...um...” My shocked mind was trying to sort through what this all meant. “My name is Jerry. I’m from Detroit.”

That got a puzzled look from everyone until someone called out. “That’s the North American continent.”

Another stepped forward. “Detroit? Are you serious?” He looked around at the others. “He’s from the twenty-first century.”

That got considerable interest and I suddenly found myself the center of a chattering throng of questions. Finally Josh waved and everyone fell silent. “Be careful, we can’t be getting ourselves too noticed. There are some real Union soldiers here after all.”

The group nodded knowingly and began to disperse.

Josh turned to me and winked. “The charge will be coming soon, but we have a few minutes to talk.” He did a quick scan of my body and frowned. “You don’t have any deflecting devices on you?”

“Deflecting devices?”

He waved his hand. “I forgot. You’re from an earlier age. I’ve been in that period a couple of times, but I didn’t know anyone had developed time travel that early. What method do you use for transport?”

My first inclination was to distrust this stranger and not give out any details. But as I watched his movement and mannerisms, it became obvious that he and the others weren’t of this period, despite their realistic disguises. I decided to chance it. “We were pursuing several approaches, but finally settled on the Cosmic Strings.”

Josh grimaced. “Man-made I gather. That’s pretty dangerous. Good luck.”

I waited for him to elaborate, but he just rose and began to shoulder his musket. “I’ve got to move up. I’m going to lead the countercharge down the hill today.”

“Wait,” I called after him. “How many time travelers are here?”

He stopped and gave me a queer look. “Oh, maybe two or three thousand from Earth. Many more times that number from other planets.”

“Thousands?” I gaped. “And there are aliens here posing as Civil War soldiers?”

“Of course. The American Civil War is the most popular war in the Universe. We get participants from as far away as Q-31. In fact, General Lee is from there.”

“Robert E. Lee is an alien?”

“Quiet.” He waved his arms at the ground as he looked nervously about.

“But thousands,” I gasped. “The Battle of Gettysburg is just one big spacetime reenactment?”

“I wouldn’t say that, exactly. But it’s certainly larger in scope than it would have been.”

I began to speak, but he shook his head. “We’ll have an after-action session over on Big Round Top once the battle’s over. I can answer any questions you have then. Be sure to stop by. A lot of us would love to meet someone from such an early time.” With that he went trotting off down the hill to join a growing group of blue shirts forming up a skirmish line.

I gazed to my right and, through the smoke and haze, could make out a crescent ridge expanding to the north, ending in two hills. There was a flurry of activity to the east as Federal troops continued moving up to the already well dug in line. More seemed to be coming up by the moment, but none seemed to be heading towards our weak and exposed position. The cadence of the sergeants mixed with the clanking of wagons and cannon, the machinery of war preparing for battle. I couldn’t see the town of Gettysburg for the smoke, so I shifted my attention to the west. The low ripples of Seminary Ridge stretched northward and I knew that somewhere beyond Cashtown Road was Lee’s headquarters. The west and south were covered by forest, but below me was a wide expanse of rock-strewn pasture that led to a small dirt road.

A large hand slapped me on the shoulder, breaking my train of thought. A small man with sergeant’s stripes stood motioning with his pistol for me to rise. I became aware of the passing of men flowing off the hill and down the ridge. He said, “Let’s go soldier, we’re moving out.”

I dumbly got up and began to slowly follow the herd, while trying to figure out what to do. I had intended to move back off the line, towards the wagons in the rear, away from the fight. Now I had gotten caught up in some kind of front line movement. “Where are we going?” I asked a man on my right, hoping he was a time traveler.

The red, exhausted eyes of a real Federal soldier answered me. “To reinforce the battery,” he grunted, motioning ahead towards an intersection of two roads about one hundred yards distant. There was a small field of wheat and just beyond that, a small orchard. I could see other soldiers moving railings around and digging in. My God, they couldn’t be thinking of defending that ground? That would be right in the line of the Rebel attack.

We had already reached the base of the ridge and I knew I had to do something fast. I feigned tripping on one of the boulders that were everywhere and began limping back in the other direction. My movement caught the eye of the sergeant who quickly started in my direction.

He intercepted my path. “Where yer goin’?” he spit out. He eyes blazed with contempt.

I motioned to my ankle. “Hurt. Got to go back.”

The blow came swiftly, striking me in the forehead. I looked up at him through pain and blood.

“On yer feet and down the hill.” He cocked his pistol and leveled it at my eyes.

I rose and rejoined the others. They were mostly short, lean men, staring at nothing as they trudged forward. I had to watch my step for the ground was covered with boulders. I didn’t see how either side could place artillery, but I could see pieces being

wheeled into position ahead of me. Off in the distance, I could see wagons dragging Confederate cannons into place: Napoleons, Parrots, and that English cannon, the Whitworth. There was no wind; the air was thick and dead all around. We soon arrived at the peach orchard and I was tasked with moving rails to set up a reinforced fence line facing southwest. Soldiers grunted and sweated the big Napoleons into place, while others continued digging in. I glanced nervously about looking for any Southern soldiers, or perhaps some other way out, but saw neither.

Suddenly there was thunder ahead of me and I stopped to look up. White puffs of smoke were coming off my right to the west and I saw movement in the trees. Officers began running about bawling for a skirmish line to be set along the fence. I was forced into the line shoulder to shoulder with others. A sense of panic seized me. Wait, it's not even three o'clock and the attack doesn't come until after four. We've got time. I tried to settle down and think. But my thoughts were interrupted by a weird wailing that sounded like animals in intense pain. It was coming from the throats of men, hundreds of men. Then my brain registered what it was: the Rebel yell. My God, here they come.

There was a great commotion to the front and a mass of screaming men broke from the tree line, charging directly at us. It looked like the whole Confederate Army. Simultaneously there were thundering crashes close about, blasting my senses. I was dimly aware of bodies being blown backwards and screams of agony, but those in my section of the line stayed whole and we tensed, waiting for the order to fire. Red pennants flapped within the attacking throng and I recognized the brigade colors. These were Mississippians, the toughest fighters of McLaw's Division. They were spearheading the attack on Cemetery Ridge and we were going to take the first hit. My

mind locked up as I gripped my Enfield and took aim. Vaguely I thought of my foolishness, that I was about to die and for what? I also remembered that I was a time traveler – an interloper in history – and of what might come of my actions. I was just supposed to observe, not participate.

“Fire,” came the command and the line erupted with white smoke. Many in the approaching vanguard went down, but the wave continued rolling towards us. Thoughts flashed across my fevered brain. They’re coming at us en echelon, not concentrating. Not that it made any difference; we were cut off from the main Union forces up on Cemetery ridge. The Rebs could easily flank us. How could this be happening?

I watched it in a daze and then realized that the others in our line were frantically biting paper cartridges and ramming home balls, trying to reload for another volley. I set myself to this task and became aware of multiple zipping and thunking sounds. All was white smoke, crashing thunder, and confusion. The man next to me said something but I couldn’t hear him in the noise. Shells were tearing through the trees, smashing limbs. Granite dust was flying everywhere and I could taste the salt on my lips. Two crashes erupted near me and leaves fluttered down from the trees. Confederate bullets were whipping past us and men in our line began pitching forward - the crash of our cannon blocking out their screams. My mind locked and I began to move remotely, waiting for my own death.

Our line was now firing raggedly, cutting down more attackers, but they still came on, howling that awful Rebel yell. There was noise, smoke, confusion, shouting, crashes all about. The wave continued towards us, now only about twenty yards away. In the smoke, the gleam of metal winked at me – bayonets. Bullets zipped in the leaves,

cracked the rocks. I lined up and got off another shot. I don't know if I hit anything, but I was frantically trying to get another reload in before they swept our line.

My fevered mind tried to grasp any remaining sanity, any rational thought or explanation to my situation – my scientist training and background trying to make sense in a senseless struggle. The Peach Orchard – I vaguely remembered. It was a footnote to the battle; the main action would be taking place in a few moments up on Little Round Top. But what happened here? There was nothing but noise and chaos. A man to my right clutched his stomach and mouthed an obscenity as he fell to his knees. Two men arose from reloading, side by side, and were knocked backwards before they could get off their shot. There was clanking of ramrods, grunting of exertion, screams of pain and rage. Blood, blood was everywhere.

I got my shot set and raised my rifle just as the Rebs came upon us. I pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. I must have done something wrong with my reload, but I had no time to ponder that. I felt a sting in my hip as I grabbed my rifle by the barrel and held it out as a club. The man next to me screamed and went down – giving me more room as the running figures broke through our line. I began swinging wildly, desperately trying to keep the gleaming steel bayonets away from me. Now I had a new fear: the thought of being stabbed terrified me. I continued to wildly club all within range, not even knowing if I was striking Union or Confederate. And then another blow to the hip struck like a lightning bolt and I was momentarily dazed and confused. I shook it off and turned back to the action, but my rifle was gone. I frantically looked about for something to use, but everywhere I looked there were only torn, bloodied bodies.

And then I saw that the bulk of the Rebel attackers were sweeping off behind and to the left of us, their officers urging them to continue on. But then I locked eyes with a small soldier, a boy really, wearing tattered clothes that had no trace of a uniform. And I knew in that instant that he would come for me; death was in those eyes. His bayonet glinted in the smoke and dust. I tensed in preparation for his thrust.

And then instinct took over. As he came forward, I stepped aside and seized his rifle by the barrel. I was surprised how easily I was able to wrench it from his grasp. He was small and weak, and as he fell to the side of me, I noticed how emaciated he was, how emaciated all of the soldiers were around me. I watched as he struggled to his feet and, pulling a knife, lunged at me. I backed away and tried to grab his arm, but the blade caught my bicep and I grimaced in pain. But I had knocked him off balance again and we were now rolling on the ground, trying to gain advantage on each other. He thrust the knife at my face, but I caught his wrist and held it in place. I was the stronger and he sensed it for he began to kick wildly at my legs. My grip slipped and he came down. In desperation I grasped the blade and turned it pushing. It went into his neck and he fell backwards, screaming. I lay where I was and stared at the billowing, drifting smoke above me. I was vaguely aware of blood covering my arms and side, but I felt no pain, just numb as I waited for the next bayonet thrust. I could do no more.

What is time? Don't ask the physicist or philosopher, ask the soldier. The moments before battle, when death's dark face is staring directly at you, time stops. Every second is dragged out to infinity. And when the action starts, the mind babbles and everything comes apart; time rushes by at a gallop. In the battle, there is no time.

I don't know how long I lay there, but I sensed the pace of firing was moving off behind us. I could still hear the thunder of cannon and the screams of combat, but it was fading. I rose on my elbows and tried to check my condition. My hand and arm were badly cut, but the bleeding was slowing down. I ripped my shirt and made a crude compress. As I rose to my feet, pain coursed through my hip. On examination, I found a bullet had grazed me, but the wound wasn't serious. I tested my legs and found that I could walk, so I searched the area and found my Enfield. Propping it over my shoulder, I started off towards the ridge. There were no sergeants to stop me.

The field was becoming gloomy and I judged from the position of the sun that several hours had passed. I had to force my eyes away from the bodies I picked my way through, for I was already sick enough. And the smell... it was dizzying.

As I came closer to the ridge, I angled over towards Little Round Top. The fighting had stopped and I could see movements of both blue and gray-green. Chamberlain's men from the Twentieth Maine and the Eighty-Third Pennsylvania were rounding up Confederate prisoners – many of whom were also time travelers. I was getting good at spotting them by now. I also noticed that most of them seemed to be drifting to the south, towards Big Round Top. I headed in that direction.

I entered the trees at the south end of the hill and lost sight of most of the other soldiers. I continued in what I thought was a southerly direction, alone in my thoughts. I was jolted by a slap on the shoulder. I looked up to see the grimy, yet smiling face of Josh.

“Jerry, we didn't see you up on Little Round Top. Did you get to witness the action?”

“Um, not exactly. I was down in the peach grove.”

Josh stopped and stared at me, shocked. “You were with Sickles? And you weren’t equipped with any deflectors?”

I nodded dumbly.

“How did that happen?”

“I stayed on the ridge sightseeing instead of going back to join the Twentieth Maine and got caught up in the Corps’ movement.”

Josh shook his head in amazement. “I’ve seen some participants who refuse to use deflectors, but never in a fight like that.” He started walking away. “Come on to the after-action session. I’m sure the group will want to hear your story.”

We continued on through the trees, passing other time travelers in small groups, animatedly talking. Josh prattled on about the charge with Chamberlain off the hill and his role in sweeping along the right side, the end of the door. I followed without talking, still confused about events and my role in the battle. Dark shadows were creeping through the forest and the air began to cool. Finally, we saw some light and Josh headed in that direction.

We broke out into a clearing that was ringed with some kind of illumination I couldn’t make out. There were about three hundred soldiers, both Union and Confederate, who were milling about, talking to each other.

Someone caught Josh’s attention. “Excuse me, Jerry. I want to go say Hi to someone. I’ll be back soon. There are some friends here I want you to meet.” He hurried off and was swallowed up in the crowd.

I wandered around the edge of the throng, trying to unobtrusively observe the various time travelers. Some of them were aliens, Josh had said, but they all had the dead-on appearance of Civil War soldiers. Many had evidence of serious wounds, but it didn't seem to affect or bother any of them. The technology available here must be incredible; my scientist instincts were returning. I eavesdropped on some of the conversations.

“Well, if Lee had let Longstreet send one of Hood's brigades around the left flank, then we could have gotten into your trains and rolled up the whole Northern Army.”

“No, Hood would have been trapped away from the main body and decimated. He would also not have been available for the main assault and Longstreet wouldn't have been able to concentrate an attack. And besides...”

“They should have brought Heth up from the reserve and put him into the fight. The extra manpower would have overwhelmed them here.”

“I don't know. Heth's Division was pretty worn out. I don't think they would have had much impact. Better to expedite Law's men and get them into the fight. Then...”

“Longstreet should have ignored Lee and concentrated his attack, not go in en echelon. McLaws was held up for over an hour. You need to concentrate your forces.”

“No, if he had done that, then the Union cannons would have enfiladed his lines. Lee is not as foolish as you guys seem to think. En echelon would have worked here. You hit their line in one place, they shift troops to meet the attack, you hit them

somewhere else. Maybe you catch them on the move and break through. Union lines were thin. Besides...”

“Actually, the guy who lost this battle wasn’t Lee, but someone who hasn’t even shown up yet: J.E.B. Stuart. If he had been scouting the Union lines instead of ...”

“If the Confederates had only gotten some batteries to the summit of Round Top; that would have changed everything.”

“Yeah, but then Meade would have withdrawn the Federal Army and there wouldn’t have been any Battle of Gettysburg.”

I broke from the group and made my way to the edge of the tree line. A golden hue from sunset flickered across the battlefield and I could see lone figures moving among the dead. The enormity of what I had just witnessed, what I had experienced, swept through me like an avalanche. I had been prepared to see death, but not this much death. It stretched out as far as the eye could see: bodies scattered like autumn leaves.

And suddenly this group I was a part of, these time travelers, seemed to be an obscenity. The American Civil War was a monumental struggle of ideas and faith. Men died fighting their countrymen in what would decide the fate of this great nation. But to these people, or beings, or whatever they were, this was just a game: an intellectual exercise. And I now knew that my intruding here was foolish vanity, that all of our presence was a blasphemy in history.

My thoughts were interrupted by an approaching figure. It was Josh.

“Ah, Jerry. There you are. Why don’t you come back and I’ll introduce you to some of the others. You can tell of your experience down in the peach orchard.”

I shook my head. “Maybe next time. I’ve got to get back to my pickup point. Could you show me the road back to Littlestown?”

He frowned doubtfully, then shrugged. “Sure, follow me.”

We walked in silence as I struggled with my thoughts.

Josh finally asked. “Jerry, is something bothering you?”

I turned to him. “Josh, when I was back there with the group, all they talked about were tactics of the battle: nothing about time travel or other associated technologies. I mean, some of the extraordinary applications that...”

But Josh was shaking his head. “Jerry, when you go to a meeting of other scientists, do you spend all of your time talking about what form of transportation got you there? These time travelers are here because they love the American Civil War. If I understand my history, there were quite a few Civil War fanatics in your day, wasn’t there?”

I nodded. “Point taken.”

“But I can see something else is bothering you.”

“I met his eyes, not knowing how to put what I felt into words. “In the fight today, I killed a man, a boy really. I looked him right in his eyes as he died. I don’t think I can ever forget that. He wouldn’t be dead except for me and I have no real business being here. I’m a scientist, not a soldier, and this isn’t my time. My life is 150 years in the future. And I’ve changed the past by my actions. What if I’ve undone the future I know?”

Josh smiled and put his hand on my shoulder. “The past is the past, Jerry, and that soldier’s death is a part of it. You haven’t changed the past, you’re just a part of it

too.” He stared at me hard. “And had you perished down in the peach orchard, that also would have been a part of history. Other time travelers have died before they were born. That is why time travel is not common even though the technology is well known throughout the universe. Time travel is not for the faint-of-heart; it’s a dangerous business and most who do it take great precautions. You must carefully research the history of the era, people and even specific location if you are not to attract attention to yourself. And even then, recorded history is so inexact; it’s impossible to get everything right. It’s hard not to stand out. And if you are seen as different or strange in most time periods, the result can be disastrous.

“Now, it’s relatively easy to blend in here without being noticed because the Northern Army is a disorganized group of vastly dissimilar men. There are many religions and strange accents here; some don’t even speak English. So a careful time traveler won’t stick out here. It’s a little more difficult on the Confederate side: they all speak English and are mainly of one religion. There are some other popular events that attract large groups of travelers, but those are few in number.”

We stopped and I followed his gaze off to the southwest. Campfires flickered gently in the hills and music could be heard off in the distance. I recognized ‘Bonny Blue Flag’ played on fifes and bugles and the muted singing. Josh shook his head and smiled. “There is the Confederate Army at Gettysburg: over seventy thousand men, mostly unpaid and self-equipped. The Southern Army has good morale though, much better than the Union. The Rebs lost eight thousand men today and they’ll lose thousands more tomorrow. But they’re over there singing.”

He turned back and nodded to his right. “Here’s the road to Littlestown. You shouldn’t run into anybody. There’s not much movement, since all of the forces have come forward to meet Pickett’s Charge tomorrow. We’ll all be there. But it’s even more gruesome than the fight at Little Round Top. It’s probably for the best you skipping that.”

I nodded agreement. Josh lightly clapped me on the shoulder and turned towards the front lines. He soon disappeared into the night and I was alone. The winking fires mixed with the sounds of horses, men and wagons. I knew I should stay for the third day: try to get as much additional information as possible, especially about some of the technologies represented here.

But I turned my back on Gettysburg and continued walking east.

You can probably imagine the reaction I got when I returned. I was rushed to the hospital, where my wounds were treated although I was released the next day. When I got back to the lab, my entire project team held a large celebration for our outstanding success. Several of the corporate officers stopped by and heartily congratulated me on this major breakthrough. My schedule for briefings and presentations would be rapidly filling up, I was told. Afterward, we held a screening of the images from my micro-recorders just for the project staff. Everyone wanted to be the next to go and everyone wondered why, in my moment of triumph, I was so strangely somber. I finally excused myself, claiming exhaustion, and left the party with everyone still jubilantly celebrating.

I returned to my apartment and went through the accumulated mail for the last week; it was all bills or junk. I took one letter and stuffed it in my pocket. And now I’m

back at the “Gare St. Lazare” mid-way through my second Bass Ale. I’ve got the letter unfolded in front of me.

“Good news?” The cute bartender was before me wiping the counter. Her demeanor hadn’t changed from before; she was only making neutral conversation to a regular customer.

I shrugged. “It’s just the announcement of a reenactment of the Battle of Antietam being held in Maryland in a couple of months. You know, registration forms, hotels, restaurants in the area, rules for participants, the usual.”

“Oh, so you’re into those Civil War reenactments?” Her interest perked up slightly. “I used to date a guy who was into that. He was pretty obsessive about it.”

We had opened up a new era with our discoveries and more knowledge about time travel would be forthcoming. Meanwhile, I felt that it was time for me to move on. With my newfound celebrity status within Detroit Labs, my position was probably fairly secure. Maybe it was time to leave the Time Traveling project and take on something else. There were rumors floating about that a team was being formed to look into means of penetrating into the spiritual realm. Who knew what kind of military and commercial application that might have? I could probably finagle my way onto that project.

I folded up the paper and mashed it back into my pocket. “Yeah, well, I’m not that much into it anymore. I won’t be attending this year. I’ve got other things to do.”

I would contemplate my professional future over another Bass. I signaled the bartender who nodded and went into the cooler. She uncapped the brown bottle and started down the bar. I began to think about a new opening line for her, something clever.

There are other challenges I want to meet in this life.

The American Civil War really is the most popular war in the universe. You can fill a good-sized library with books written on the subject. But if you had to read only one of them, I recommend Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize winning novel: "The Killer Angels". Likewise, if you're interested in the science behind how time travel could be possible, I recommend, "Time Travel In Science and Science Fiction" by ???(fill in later).

But this is not a story about The Civil War or time travel. In my younger days, while serving in the military, I participated in combat operations in Vietnam. It made quite an impression on me (war is a serious, nasty business) and ever since, I've been somewhat cynical and skeptical of anyone who glorifies combat: especially if they've never suffered combat themselves. Years ago I was presenting a business speech at a conference in Virginia and had the chance to witness a group of civil war reenactors as they prepared for their fake battle. They all seemed to really be in to it: this was all a lark, lots of fun. Arguably, the American Civil War was one of the most savage and bloody conflicts in the history of Man and I wondered at the time what these individuals would think if they ever found themselves in the midst of real Civil War battle. And from that, the germ of an idea for this story took shape.