



The WrongTime

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An Anthology, containing some flash fiction, a novella and three short stories:

The short stories:

- A filmmaker of the future, using a new untested medium, gets tangled up in his story in *The Filmmaker and the Sceptre*
- Relativity works in mysterious ways in *The Last Shall be First*
- Geoffrey literally finds himself, in the *Wrong Track*

The novella: "I thought all this stuff about time warps and things was silly scifi stuff. I'm not a fan of Star Trek or any of these other things -- which I thought was for people who couldn't get a life, who sit in their parents basement with their chemistry sets and oscilloscopes. I thought I was a level headed, successful, morally responsible member of society. Until one day I stepped into ... *The Wrong Time*"

The flash fiction: From a physics class of the future: what is a "flong"? in *The History of Physics*

and more...

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Excerpt from *The Filmmaker and the Sceptre* (first few paragraphs):

Sir Gossabel mounted his steed, then beheld his opponent from across the field. What was going through the mind of that wretch, he could only guess. And what did Princess Gertrude see in him? He didn't want to think. This duel would settle the matter.

At the signal, the opponents goaded their horses, and they galloped towards each other, their swords drawn and ready.

Gossabel knew better than to glance at the spectators. That could be fatal. The hazy image at the extreme periphery of his vision still showed the curled blond ringlets of the princess's head next to the grey locks of King Redbert's, surrounded by those of all the important people of the kingdom. No doubt she was tense -- as she had been when Gossabel had taken the liberty of looking.

Her father looked solemn, though some of the lords took the whole affair in a light hearted manner:

'Let's see which of these two upstarts will be left standing!'

'I could have told you it would come to this!'

'Ten Ducets says Norbert's blood will flow...'

'I say Gossabel's...'

The peasants were also gambling what few Ducets they had, calling out their favourite champion. But those who cared which one lived and which one died, weren't so jovial.

Gossabel now approached Sir Norbert. Their swords clashed...

* * *

So far so good, thought Mark. This new medium had a special feel to it. They had said this would render images in *greater than* 100 percent reality. Mark had wondered how that could be so, but now, as he was creating the cinema footage, he could tell it. Re-running it, he could even feel the flippant attitude of the lords who were being entertained by the potential fate of Sir Gossabel and Sir Norbert, the deadly vibrations of iron sword clanging against iron sword -- he almost didn't know, himself, who would be left alive at the end.

How could he not know? He was creating the story! He was the expert who had been commissioned to test this medium on a feature length production.

Yet, why was he telling himself he might have to end up making Sir Norbert the hero of the story in place of Sir Gossabel? In his whole career of film-making, he'd never experienced that thought.

For goodness sake -- if a story took a wrong turn, he could always go back and re-edit it! No, it just didn't feel as though he could, that's all. Every action reverberated with a seriousness that made it seem permanent.

This medium was powerful.

For the last 65 or so years, the film-viewing public had been satisfied with 100 percent reality 3D. Home theatres were equipped with 3-D screens taking up one whole wall of a room. Every home had one. But because of this new advance, everyone would now have to go out and spend money on a new one. This would be good for the home theatre industry. Mark Snobbel felt privileged to be on the cutting edge of the new technology.

Dr. Marvin had retained him for this job. He was the head of the team that was researching a new medium, based on recent research into the Iota Particle, a sub-atomic particle that had shown some amazing properties. It probably didn't do anything like warp time and space, or send ships to other galaxies -- or maybe it did. Dr. Marvin's team wasn't concerned with that. They were interested in the effect it had on imaging. They called them four-dimensional images. His team included nuclear physicists to develop the channel of energy, computer developers to adapt the existing computer animation programs to deal with the new medium, and Mark Snobbel, to test it.

Mark was the right man for the job. His family had been in cinematography since the days when making a film required a team of actors, camera men, technicians, film editors, not to mention the screenwriters and authors of the stories the films were based on. It cost millions to make a film in those days. Now, it was a one-person-job. Mark had distinguished himself as the best 'one-person' in the field. He was a film-maker...

Excerpt from *The Last Shall be First*:

Sarah heard the announcement over the intercom and waited for Aunt Molly to come and unstrap her.

She was undoing Benny just now. The rest were already floating about, getting dressed and enjoying their weightlessness.

'Why am I always the last one?' she asked, when Aunt Molly finally got to her.

'Cause you're the smallest, that's why,' said Benny, floating past.

'Shut up Benny!'

It wasn't so much the obvious fact, but the tone of voice in which he said it -- that coming from the second smallest kid in the home.

'Now, now, Sarah,' chided Aunt Molly. 'There's nothing wrong with smallness, and your time will come. "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first."'

'Yeah, yeah. But why do I have to wait so long?'

'Well, doesn't it stand to reason that the last one waits the longest?' said Rodger, the oldest.

'Very funny,' said Sarah, pushing herself out of her cubicle.

She pushed too hard and went spinning into the wall opposite.

'Aunt Molly! I bumped my hip!'

Aunt Molly had already floated out the hatch.

'*Aunt Molly I bumped my hip!*' mimicked Benny.

'Oh! You poor wee soul, let me kiss it and make it all better!' mocked Rodger. His towel was floating strategically spread out in front of his midriff. He had decided a year ago that he was plenty old enough to not allow the others to glimpse his body while changing or bathing.

'Aunt Molly! Benny and Rodger are tormenting me!' Sarah began crying, 'And my hip really hurts!'

'You guys, can't you leave her alone for once?' said Sandra.

'Yeah,' seconded Johnny.

Sarah was drifting in the direction in which she had bounced, which was towards Rodger and his carefully placed towel.

'Hoi! Watch where you're going!'

A quick shove from Rodger sent Sarah floating to the very middle of the room. Along with her, went the towel, revealing Rodger in the awkward transition between his pyjama bottoms and his underpants. The resultant panic to retrieve his towel had the whole room laughing -- all but Sarah, who moped in the middle of the room, crying for the house mother.

* * *

The house parents, Molly and Joe were with Peter in the bridge.

'What do you mean, we're still at near-light speed?' said Joe.

'A technical failure,' answered Peter. 'The flex co-modulator didn't kick off as we were leaving hyperspace. By the time we've slowed this thing down, we'll be too far beyond the Iota Seven star system to consider coming back to it.'

'You know what this means?'

'We can't get to our destination?' asked Molly.

'Not unless you use the emergency landing pods,' said Peter.

'How will we unload everything we need into those?'

'There are ten of them,' said Peter. 'Put one kid in each one, and then you two, that's nine. There should be enough room in them to put essential

supplies. I'll send the remaining one with as much stuff as I can fit in.'

'But that's all your life pods,' said Molly.

'The least of my problems right now. By the time I get this slowed down, twenty years will have passed in normal time. By the time I return this ship to base, probably a hundred. But if you want to land in Iota Seven, we've no time to lose.'

Excerpt from *Wrong Track*:

How did I end up on the train going down the wrong track? Very few people know the whole story, as the telling of it is a bit complicated. The only way I know how is to start at the very beginning. So here, to begin with, are a few mental snapshots from my past, starting with my earliest memory:

#

I'm five. My dad takes me to his laboratory on Saturday mornings. It's a couple of rooms on one end of a long brick building in the middle of the university campus, surrounded by lots of big trees. Later, when I can read, I see that the letters etched in the concrete over the main door say 'Science'. Everyone we meet on the way calls him 'Dr. Hughes', or 'Professor'. In the lab there are a lot of contraptions they use for their experiments, mostly metal boxes with stuff clamped to them, like glass tubes and lead objects. Theodore is usually there, wearing a white coat. I like Theo. My dad's partner is there as well. We call him Alex, but to everyone else, he's 'Dr. Henry' and he knows everything. That's what Theo says, anyway.

Theo has lots of small jobs to do, but on Saturday mornings his job is to mind me. He takes me around to look at everything. 'That's a particle splitter,' he says. 'It takes little things that are so small you can't see them, and makes them even smaller.'

'What's a particle?' I ask.

Theo gives me my first science lesson. 'Everything you see is made of things that are even smaller. Some of the smallest things are molecules, and they're made of atoms. The atoms are made of particles that whiz around and round each other. What we do with this big contraption is to get a particle to stop going around and round the centre of the atom, so that it goes zooming off in a straight line and hits that target over there.'

He shows me the sheet of black film from the target. 'See these tiny dots, Geoffrey? Each one is where a particle went through this film.'

#

Though no earlier event would qualify as a snapshot, the big wooden house on Birch Street is an ever present reality, casting its shadow to the furthest reaches of my subconscious. I don't remember it ever having a proper paint job, except later, when it was let out to tenants. It really did make an ideal 'haunted house'.

But in my young days, it was simply 'home', spacious, places to hide, a place where friends and cousins loved to come over to play.

I also remember my mother only as a vague shadow. She died when I was four, leaving me with my dad. I do remember that my dad created a warm and loving environment. It's important that I say that here, because many people insist that he was a horrible, cold, abusive parent, and that I should have been removed from him much earlier. My memories of him are mostly good. Besides taking me to the lab, I remember us having ice cream, watching kids programs on the telly, going to the seaside, telling me stories,

patiently helping me with my homework, even playing hide-and-seek with me and my friends in that big house. We also had this game we'd play when my cousins came over, called 'sardines', the opposite of hide-and-seek. Just one of us would go and hide, and then the rest would go to look for him. Whoever found him or her would slip in and hide with them, until everyone found them. The house was perfect for those kinds of games.

#

I'm six years old: Alex and Theodore come over to the house a lot. They and my dad are excited about an experiment they've been working on. They think it proves something, but they have to do something else to show that it's really working.

Theo pops into my room whenever he's there, and looks at my stuff. I've drawn lots of pictures and things, and he thinks they're cool. He also plays with my train set.

He can be funny sometimes.

'So, you turn the switch this way to make the train go down the left track, and you switch it that way to make the train go down the right. What happens if you put the switch in the middle, like this?'

'It'll just get stuck!' I say.

'Not the train set we're playing with at the lab. We can make it go down both tracks at once!'

'No way!'

Theo is full of weird ideas...

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