

1.

The Memphis Belle II emerged from its return through the Time Tunnel as planned. Its pilot, San Marcos, had named the craft after an ancient airplane that had always gotten Her crew safely home during the Second World War. The Time Keeper had been gracious enough to allow him to decorate the craft with its moniker in the haste filled moments before departure through the Time Tunnel.

This aircraft however, looked nothing like its ancestor. Whereas the original had been a clunky crate made of pistons, propellers, and steel, the Memphis Belle II was a sleek, silver, aerodynamically designed low profile craft whose titanium curves caressed any space it inhabited.

It was a perfect blue sky evening as it flew automatically low upon the horizon. San Marcos shook himself out of the physically locked state that went along with Tunnel traversal. He grabbed the yoke and resumed control from the computer. The viewer window transitioned from opaque to transparent. He was over a beach. The deep blue crests crashed upon infinite sand crystals. The sun had already set, but there was still a warm glow of fire upon the horizon.

He decided to have a little fun before he landed. He climbed high, turned and then descended, imagining he was the pilot of the original Memphis Belle above the battlefields of Europe dodging Messerschmitts. He leveled off, barely above the waves and barrel rolled the Memphis Belle II. He briefly hovered Her above the sand, and let down the landing gear before touching ground. He performed final system checks, shut the Memphis Belle II completely off and made a motion with his right hand. The door of the craft opened, a small set of steps cascaded downward.

He grabbed his gear, walked down and set foot on the beach. He paused, smiling, bent over to take off his boots, then began walking barefoot upon the sand. There was a man waving at him where the forest met the beach. The stranger began trotting across the gap to meet San Marcos.

The man stopped mere meters away from San Marcos. His hair was dark brown, had a wooly unkempt beard and wore a uniform with insignia unknown to San Marcos. "Hello, Mate! My name is Sumner. Watched you hotdogging out there. Impressive. I bet you're hungry. We

have food.” He motioned to San Marcos who couldn’t quite place the accent and speech cadence of the stranger.

San Marcos smiled , “Why yes, I am hungry. Starving.”

“You’re in luck, then. “ said Sumner. “The feast is on at our village.”

San Marcos followed Sumner across the beach and through the woods. They reached Sumner’s village. The savory aroma of food filled the air. It made San Marcos even hungrier.

Sumner led him to a door, “Come in! Soup is on!”

San Marcos was about to enter but paused to say “Could you tell me where I am?”

“Ha, knew you would ask that, mate. I’ll tell you where you are not.” Sumner turned northward and pointed, “See that little twinkling star up yonder?” he asked.

San Marcos looked up and nodded.

“Well, around that medium star, there orbits a tiny rock which it’s inhabitants call The Earth.”

2.

Meanwhile, on that insignificant planet, in a city called Brussels, sat The Time Keeper. Her name was Helen Kfoury and she was the eighth in a line of Time Keepers who had managed the rogue black hole on the solar system's edge that had appeared in the sky on April 25, 2070. Its appearance had immediately affected the stream of time and the shape of space. She was the head scientist for Time Incorporated, which used the black hole against itself, sending Time Teams through it, back to the past where deviations could be corrected.

A signal blinked. She motioned. A black screen rose from the table. She looked at her reflection. She saw wide brown eyes sunken into a petite round face, with an uncontrollable mane of curly hair tied upon her head. She put her hands through it, she untied and let it down. She pulled it back and looked at the prominent Mallen streak that ran straight through her locks of otherwise black hair.

The panel illuminated. She looked to one side and swiped her left hand, reading output while her right hand calculated. The equations looked balanced. It appeared that San Marcos had accomplished the mission. Darkness would not fall upon Europe, The world wouldn't succumb to starvation and anarchy. The 20th century Time Stream had been rectified.

She let out a heavy sigh and whispered silently to herself, "I'll be damned. The boy actually did it."

She resolutely said, "Screen off. Light twenty percent."

She walked to an adjacent room. It was time to perform the hardest part of her job. And she loathed it. It was why she only used the Time Tunnel under life critical circumstances. But, she had to follow protocol. She had taken an oath to uphold it. And part of that protocol stated that no evidence of a Time Team could be left on either side of the Tunnel.

"On..." she commanded.

A hologram appeared. She walked into its web as its red, green and blue strands engulfed her.

"Tunnel close" she stated.

The hologram morphed.

“End loop.”

It dimmed.

“Confirmed..” she stated.

Stepping aside she commanded, “Off.”

The deed was done and there was a bottle of gin waiting somewhere with her name on it.

3.

On a planet orbiting Alpha Centauri, the Memphis Belle II exploded into billions of microscopic fragments. It was not detected from Earth.

San Marcos and Sumner heard the explosion in the distance. San Marcos shivered. Sumner patted him on the back, guiding him into the house. “You need to eat my friend. It’ll make you feel better.”

“But...” begged San Marcos.

“Eat now, questions later,” replied Sumner.

They entered the house and saw the feast that had been awaiting their arrival.