The Impossibilities and Absurdities of Time Travel in Science Fiction

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When William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan began writing their New Year's Eve operetta *Pirates of Penzance* in 1879, it was necessary that the English librettists outdo their previous hit, *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The lampooning of English high society and the British Royal Navy in *Pinafore* was an easy target for Gilbert and Sullivan, so *Penzance* had to be something out of the ordinary, something truly absurd. The premise of the operetta is about a young apprentice named Frederic who, after twenty years of service to a group of rather genteel pirates, is given leave of duties to pursue whatever path he may wish. He falls in love with a daughter of Major General Stanley, who abhors the idea of his daughters associating with pirates. Dejected, Frederic does not know what to do, and his pirate family misses him. His paternal figures, in an attempt to get him back, discover a loophole regarding his birthday, as he was born on the 29th of February, a necessary correctional day that occurs once every four years according to the Gregorian calendar. Because of this, Frederic has paradoxically lived for twenty years while only being five years old according to his birth date.

This particular instance of absurdity and impossibility does not unhinge the play. To the contrary, the joke is the central argument for Frederic to remain with the pirates until he can return to his beloved. The centrality of the joke on the complete arbitrariness of the calendar year both mocks scientific assumptions of time while simultaneously acknowledging its necessity. Since calendars are constructs of time based around revolutions of the sun, the paradoxes, impossibilities, and absurdities of time itself can be exploited for entertainment value. While this type of narrative construction can be seen throughout a broad variety of books, films, television series, and other media, time travel is an element found most often in science fiction writing. In this article, I wish to look at how the mechanism of time travel, while impossible to practice according to our current scientific understanding, offers an enjoyment of paradoxes and absurdities for a reader by allowing stories based in time travel to be patently impossible.

For the purposes of this article, I will be looking at two particular examples of the absurd in time travel from Spain, and how each of these texts illustrates important concepts regarding scientific time travel as an absurd narrative device. Moreover, because these science fiction works hail from Spain, they better demonstrate the universality of time travel tropes across cultures and languages. The first is "Mein Führer" by Rafael Marín, a short story that parodies the now cliché "go-back-in-time-to kill-Hitler" scenario. The second is a novella titled *Tríptico de Dios* by Miquel Barceló

and Pedro Jorge Romero, a far-in-the-future space opera about good and evil. Both of these examples demonstrate different elements that reflect absurdity within the use of time travel in science fiction, one focusing on the dilemmas of alternate timelines of the past, the other focusing on a far-flung future written and rewritten by time travel.

At this point I need to explain what absurdity means in regards to this article. Absurdity can be defined from some sort of impossibility – a disconnect that proves difficult to resolve. The term comes from the Latin *absurdus*, meaning out of tune or discordant, often referring to irrationality. Thomas Nagel, an American philosopher, further defines absurdity as the incongruity between the objective world (realities in which we are bound by sets of rules that are very hard, if not impossible, to break) and the subjective world (imagined realities in which our thoughts, emotions, and ideas create the rules of existence), and how those incongruities ultimately clash time and time again. For Nagel, absurdities often produce laughter, mostly because they are like the accidental sour note that is played against a backdrop of mostly harmonious consistencies (Plant 113, Luper-Foy 85). This clash between the objective and subjective worlds presents something that either will leave a person fuming at how ridiculous the juxtaposition is, or will make the person laugh at the irresolvable nature of the paradox. The latter is normally the preferred choice within a storytelling context.

The definition of absurdity does not imply inherently negative connotations. As seen with *Pirates of Penzance,* the absurdity of the situation offers a solution to the conundrum that Frederic faces. Absurdity as a literary technique often becomes an essential, even endearing, aspect of many stories. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* would indeed not be the same were it not for the twists and turns in narratological strangeness. Likewise, a film such as *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* would not be as enjoyable for the audience were the writers trying to explain the main characters' actions logically. In short, deliberate and self-conscious attempts at absurdity help to solve some of the more problematic elements of plot construction. This is especially true with time.

The problematic nature of time lies in its measurement and documentation. Definitions of time are wide and varying, and can change from field to field. For instance, the term "real time" in technology could either refer to a live event being broadcast at the same time it is recorded, or it could refer to the amount of computing time it takes from one action to a reaction (Hu 164). The difficulty of nailing down an accurate and consistent definition of time shows the level of subjectivity involved. The incongruity of living on a planet that revolves around the sun at a regular pace being arbitrarily subdivided into years, months, days, hours, and minutes present an incongruity of massive proportions when we start to include major life events in those days, years, and the like. This incongruity between the known objective times and dates, and our subjective perception to them can make the task of measuring time seem quite absurd.

The incongruity of our perception between perceived time and time as it passes on the clock is a form of existential absurdity. There are times in which the hours lazily pass by without anything happening, while other days the hours slip by with such feverish pace that panic sets in after realizing how much time has passed. Our existence, in this case, is not contingent on the unalterable speed of time measured by clocks, but rather our subjective reaction to it. In reality, we can find almost anything in our world to be foreign enough that it almost terrifies us of how strange it really is,

including time. This idea was principally introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre in his book Being and Nothingness, where almost any human conception of time, reality, or being could be reduced to its most absurd elements. For our experience of time, divisions and subdivisions of it lead to a complete obliteration of what it may have originally meant to us. Sartre argues that the only thing that can actually experience time is our being, and nothing else:

> [A] rigorous analysis which would attempt to rid the present of all which is not it – i.e., of the past and of the immediate future – would find that nothing remained but an infinitesimal instant. As Husserl remarks in his Essays on the Inner Consciousness of Time, the ideal limit of a division pushed to infinity is a nothingness. Thus each time that we approach the study of human reality from a new point of view we rediscover that indissoluble dyad, Being and Nothingness. (120)

While this line of reasoning might be a bit fatalistic, it indicates a very vital point in the quest to understand the absurdity of time: the more our perception fixates on trying to categorize time according to standards other than the basic months/days/hours/etc., the more time cannibalizes its own normality and becomes difficult to understand.

Likewise, the imaginary technology of a time machine is equally paradoxical. In many instances of imagined technology like a time machine, the makeup and general principle of the machine itself do not depart too far from other machines that do equally fantastic and unimaginable things that exist in the real world. A large hadron collider, for example, would have been thought of as a complete impossibility no less than thirty years ago. Moreover, technology such as cellphones or bluetooth devices can be seen as almost magical in their capabilities to communicate. Coupled with Sartre's theory, one could argue that the creation of time machines are simply concrete frameworks which problematize the temporal absurdity that is our experience of time. In other words, the time machine becomes a big magnifying glass that exposes the void of existence. This reduction of the base absurdity of time returns again to Nagel's definition of absurdity: an incongruous juxtaposition of supposed objective factors and our subjective experience.

In order for us to better perceive how time travel in narrative is absurd, there needs to be a categorization of the types of time travel that are possible. Dale Pratt argues that narratological time travel can be categorized into two forms: chronoperception and chronomotion. Chronoperception acts as the mental frame of reference, and in literature it manifests itself through flashbacks, premonitions, or extraperceptive visions of the present. Chronomotion is the actual movement of time, and such motion can be achieved through the use of a device or machine in science fiction ("Narratological Problems"). Both terms in and of themselves are absurd, because they both clash against reality, imagined or otherwise.

The idea of going back in time to change a past event in order to bring about a different effect in the future runs many risks and paradoxes, some of which will be discussed later in this article. The intended use of a time machine to physically be removed from the present into a dimension before or after the present carries all sorts of funny, odd, and unresolvable conflicts in the narrative. These conflicts sometimes stay unresolved, much to the amusement of an audience that sees the irony of intended time travel not being fulfilled.

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It is equally intriguing that perception and memory regarding a certain past event can change dramatically over time, even though the actions of the event remained unchanged. This is due in part to the emotions, analysis, and subsequent actions that take place after the fact. Sutton, Harris, and Barnier in their article regarding human cognition aptly describe this process as a compost heap that mixes memories with other memories and the aforementioned post hoc interpolations of memory: "If human memory is more like a compost heap than a storehouse of discrete cells, then its intrinsic dynamics drive our productive capacities to select and to generalize appropriately" (Sutton et al. 214). What makes the compost heap truly stinky is that whatever memories come out of it will be entangled in the ambrosia of the complexities of memory. A clean, unsullied recollection simply does not exist, which makes time travel through memory a nearfarcical activity.

Chronoperceptive and chonomotive stories do not necessarily have to be based in science fiction. For example, A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens uses the chronoperception of Ebenezer Scrooge to examine past events in his life, as well as see the future toward which his current life trajectory will carry him. Scrooge is unable to alter or interact with these visions in real time, therefore it is chronoperceptive rather than chronomotive. Moreover, Robert Zemeckis's blockbuster film *Back to the Future* would fit in the category of chronomotive, as the use of a modified DeLorean car is able to physically transport passengers through space and time to certain points in history, thereby allowing them to interact with and change either the past or the future. While there are elements of science fiction in *Back to the Future*, the technology comes secondary to the scenario, resulting in soft science fiction for the most part.

Before analyzing the texts, it should be said that the underlying absurdity of all time travel rests on the impossibility of it ever happening in the first place. There currently are speculations of parallel universes (Clark) and the possibility of time travel (Sutter). But for the sake of a simplistic definition, time travel does not currently exist in the forms which will be seen in the following works. It is a subjective projection of our outward reality, our desire to correct mistakes in the past, or to divine the future. And still this projection does not make it real, just as a dream – however vivid it may be – is only a dream.

The story of "Mein Führer" by Rafael Marín starts with a few young Nazis two hundred years after World War II who are able to use the newly-invented time machine to kill Winston Churchill. The machine is only able to work once, so it is a suicide mission. They successfully kill Churchill, but the timeline switches to a different path, causing a revolutionary named Wolfgang Büchner to plan a similar assassination attempt on Hitler's life. His jump into the past to kill Hitler is successful only to the point where he catches Hitler without any pants. Just as he is about to kill him, another

Nazi named Hans Kliest, who has been time traveling for a very long time, is able to rescue Hitler, put him in the time machine, and send him off into the continuum alone. Hans and Wolfgang die in the explosion rigged to destroy Hitler's estate, but Hitler himself is now "señor de espacio y tiempo" in his newfound time machine. We immediately realize that, while it is quite funny that Hitler is without any pants, he poses a very new and very real threat to humanity, choosing to go to wherever and whenever he pleases.

The paradox of ever-diverging timelines is a daunting and altogether frightening prospect when carefully considered. This is perhaps one reason why readers find solace in the thought that such a complication of timelines is merely a hypothetical and not a real situation that we experience on a regular basis. The troublesome nature of alternate histories is cushioned by the fact that they are only imaginations, incongruities with reality that entertain certain scenarios otherwise impossible to narrate. "Mein Führer" plays with fantasy fulfillment in an almost perverse way, because it subverts the hypothetical situation in its most complete sense. Rather than have a tidy conclusion, the nascent pitfalls of such a venture are allowed to proliferate with every new iteration of fixing the timeline. Despite the inherent dangers, we as readers cannot help but think about how we would like to change history (personal or otherwise) so as to bend the present or future into the form we often desperately wish.

Herein lies the hermeneutical warning of "Mein Führer", that such wish fulfillment cannot, in all actuality, fulfill the desire for a utopian future. The act of constantly rewriting timelines demonstrates the impotency of man's predilection for changing the course of history. While it is quite scary that Hitler has a time machine at the end of the story, the reader must bear in mind that he still does not know how to work the machine, nor is he wearing any pants. This kind of absurd situation, coupled with the impossible timeline changes that had just barely occurred, is a reflection of the futility in trying to change history to alter it to a preferable state. The punchline is that all of the confusing attempts at restructuring the timeline proved fruitless for either side. It could very well be that the moment Hitler steps out of the machine later on, he is greeted to a world that has completely erased him from the timeline altogether, leaving him without any recourse for world conquering as one might suppose he would do given the chance with the time machine. This absurd scenario infers several major points of philosophical consideration worthy of a reader's serious thinking. While it may be absurd, time travelling Hitler should be an idea that halts a casual reading.

Philosophical and political scenarios like "Mein Führer" are nothing new in science fiction. Some of the most influential science fiction has been praised for its ability to engage in difficult discussions that are relative to the time in which they were created. The best science fiction couches its ideologies subtly without becoming too biased. An episode of *Star Trek* titled "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" demonstrated, at the time it was originally aired in 1969, the issues of racism in the history of America when racism was a matter of public policy formation. People watching the episode would immediately infer its current meaning as a critique of racist ideology in the United States at the time. The absurdity of two races that, apart from having their identical pigmentation on different hemispheres of their face, decide they are complete opposites and are mortal enemies highlights the incongruity of racist ideology: namely, that the subjec-

tive hatred of either party lies in some belief that one is superior over the other, while the reality is that one is of a differing pigmentation. Marc Angenot argues that our reading of any science fiction must relate to other elements, texts, and histories beyond the world in which the text exists: "When we read a text we should understand not only its internal narrative articulation but also its relation to wider paradigms. The result is that the text inescapably amounts to a given interpretation or model of the extratextual universe." (169) When reading as short of stories as "Mein Fürer", it is impossible to read them as a text unto themselves given their brevity. As readers, we immediately start to project our own meanings onto the text in a *Gestalt*-like manner; connecting the dots of the story can lead to many various shapes that the text can take in our minds, hence the various readings one person can get out of the same text.

A rather potent example of this phenomenon in time travel sf comes from H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, quite possibly the first time travel story in science fiction. A reading of this story can produce two very different interpretations. The first, softer reading would be the adventure novel reading, an exciting action story that leaves readers fascinated by the melodrama of the work. This is the reading that informed the creation of the 1960 MGM film adaptation of the book, where the romp of the plot is what drives the story forward. As a soft read, *The Time Machine* is quite pleasing, having all the necessary elements of suspense, drama, and excitement to engross the reader in a bit of lighthearted reading.

Yet perhaps Wells's landmark novel was never intended to be looked upon as a construction of fanciful, casual reading. Like many of his realist contemporaries of the time, Wells was interested in what could be said about the state of affairs in modern society. And also like many of his contemporaries, Wells was fascinated with the ideas of scientific advancement and how they could provide both solutions to great ills in the modern world (poverty, hunger, violence, corruption) while simultaneously being possible exacerbations to these same problems. Csicsery-Ronay points out that this was the main focus of Wells's intention behind writing *The Time Machine*, as the genre of Science Fiction as we know it today had not really been established in a deeper scientific context. As Csicsery-Ronay explains, "Wells designed his *Time Machine* only to illustrate a problem of social-political evolution. He did not experiment with the possible historical consequences of a Victorian Englishman negotiating spacetime traffic in his ride" (99).

This is the social criticism reading, where Morlocks are representations of bloodthirsty industrial capitalists, while the Eloi are exploited for the Morlocks's basest desires. In this context, it was a clear commentary on the industrial revolution's abuse of the working class, and ultimately of the world. More examples abound than can possibly be covered in this article, and the aforementioned examples are sufficiently exhaustive. Suffice it to say, there is a twinge of the absurd throughout *The Time Machine*, as creating grotesque creatures such as the Morlocks to reflect the savage nature of unbridled capitalism is yet another indication of incongruencies between our objective world (that industrial capitalists are mere businessmen) versus our subjective world (businessmen are fueled by desires that foster anti-human behavior).

In a Latin American and Iberian context, inferences to social and political issues are almost always present in science fiction as well. Political discourses are not relegated solely to English or German science fiction. Many Hispanic

writers such as Marín frame their stories with morals applicable to their home countries. "Mein Führer" is no different from The Time Machine in that tradition. While Spain was relatively removed from the conflict of WWII, the country had to grapple with its own dictatorship and brutality in the form of Franco. Likewise, an official narrative helped construct a framework by which people were forced to view the violence and terror of the Spanish Civil War, not too dissimilar to a rewriting of history altogether. After the death of Franco and during the transitional period between 1975 and the early 1980s, many authors, historians, and politicians scrambled to re-rewrite the official narrative of events and tragedies. While these attempts at reviewing the past were chock full of noble intentions, these new perspectives on the trauma of the previous forty years dealt with the unpleasant aspects of the Francoist regime and unwittingly opened a new can of historical worms. To this day, writers, artists, and Spanish citizens alike are continuing to cannibalize and reproduce this fateful era of the country's long history.

Science fiction writer Andy Duncan, in his discussion on alternate histories explains that the rewriting of history bases much of its potency in war: "Like popular history in general, alternate history also suffers from militarism – a fixation on war as the instrument of historical change – and from the flawed assertion of historian Thomas Carlyle in 1841: "The history of the world is but the biography of great men" (216).

There is little surprise, then, that a story such as "Mein Führer" would resonate well with Hispanic audiences that have seen this type of rewriting of history occur. Many Latin American countries endured the 20th century having to face dictatorships, varying levels of brutality, and domineering control. Spain had to deal with the severe censorship of contrarian political parties during the forty plus years that Franco headed the generalship of his country. Roberto González Echevarría, in his book *Myth and the Archive*, sees how this control of the national narrative is vital to the success of any regime, as the narrative of a country can determine the shared ideological goals of the entire population. While González Echevarría looks specifically at the Latin American version of this phenomenon, the same can easily be said for Francoist Spain:

> The dispersive quality of this Archive is found in the modern novel's apparent grab-bag approach to history, its endemic power to negate previous narrative forms from which it takes texts rather than continuities; the power, in short, to question received knowledge and its ideological coagulations as identity, culture, education institutions, even language [...]. (34)

The obliteration of previous timelines in this sense is much more frightening, as whole groups of people could simply be written out of history in the first place. It is the same type of manifest horror as if someone like Winston Churchill were to be gunned down by assailants from the future, or if Hitler were free to travel through time to fulfill his desires of world-domination. The time travel part of it still remains impossible in our minds, but the idea of narratological control in real history becomes unsettling to the reader.

From "Mein Führer," there is little evidence to suggest that going back in time to kill someone as despised as Hitler was ever a good idea. It is this kind of woeful possibility of a time travelling Hitler that we as audience members get

our enjoyment. Moreover, a reader will most likely laugh at the end of the piece because a pantsless Hitler riding around space and time in a lumbering orb is nothing but pure silliness, a juxtaposition of realities and fantasies.

I wish to jump from perhaps the more serious and somber side of absurdity towards a more action-packed, enjoyable encounter with the absurd and its trappings. *Tríptico de Dios* by Miquel Barceló and Pedro Jorge Romero is, without giving too much away, a reverse time travel story that explores the possibilities of multiple outcomes in time travel. As a space opera, the good side is represented by the Catholic church, now a militarized organization dedicated to defending earth from the Adversary, a being who is able to manipulate people to do his will. The first part of the triptych focuses on a future set thousands of years beyond the present, where extra-dimensional beings are trying to destroy the universe by unleashing a portal between their world and ours. It is fortunately foiled by a combat nun of a sacred military order, as she is able to destroy the rings that try to bridge the hyper-symmetrical beings' universe to our universe.

The second part of the triptych goes back in time to only a few centuries beyond our own, where a young man is manipulated by the Adversary to overthrow the computerized Space Pope that has lead the Catholic church for centuries. The young man becomes Pope Benedict XXII with the help of the Adversary, who tempts him in a manner not unlike that of Adam and Eve. He chooses to become the pope because he realizes that man's potential has laid dormant for centuries since the earth was destroyed. The reader also finds out that the Adversary is able to travel through eleven different dimensions, making him the ultimate time traveler.

The third triptych happens only a few decades from our time, where another young man named Wagner is hired by the Adversary (this time disguised as an aptly named Mr. Marlowe) to create a machine that is capable of creating unlimited amounts of energy. It becomes rather obvious that the mechanism is very similar to the ring portals that were defeated in the first part of the story. Wagner, with the help of some Catholic priests, realizes that this machine is designed to doom the world, and so decides to stop it. After he destroys it, the Adversary comes to him and tells him that, in so destroying such a machine, he has inadvertently started the creation of a black hole that will eventually destroy the earth. Yet in doing this act, Wagner inadvertently saves mankind from itself. The Adversary knows that his position in ex-istence is not so much to destroy humanity as much as it is to force humanity to overcome itself. As he explains to Wagner:

> Los detalles cambiarán, evidentemente. En unas versiones, el proyecto Marlowe será un dragón al que usted logrará vencer. En otras, la madre Martino y sus malogradas compañeras vivirán para contar su historia. La Tierra siempre morirá, porque será el hecho que precise explicación, cuya resolución se exige de la leyenda. En algunos casos, el ingenio humano, representado por usted, señor Wagner, se alzará orgulloso; en otras, el destino inexorable de la humanidad, también representado por usted, señor Wagner, caerá frente al Adversario. (248)

In this monologue to Wagner, the Adversary presents some interesting concepts: as the reader already knows, the Adversary is able to travel through various dimensions, meaning he probably has the ability to see other possible outcomes

of reality. This multiverse perspective is what drives the adversary to intervene at various times throughout existence, trying to push mankind along in their evolution as human beings. The death of the earth would force humanity to live beyond their comfortable terrestrial boundaries. The imposition of a new "Space Pope" that is not an automated machine, but rather a real person with unpredictable behaviors, will push humanity to consider the very real threat posed by the hyper-symmetrical beings. And finally, the vanquishing of the said hyper-symmetrical beings would only be possible were humanity able to have the courage and strength necessary to accomplish such a task.

The form in which narration here is used makes many of the situations, images, and characters quite absurd. Militarized nuns, Space Popes that are artificial intelligences, and a virtual Vatican City in space all are quite extraordinary concepts, and their incongruity between our reality and the perception of the author make for an absurd – and enjoyable – reading. In this story, time travel is not so much a mechanism used to carry along the plot – it is the plot. As readers, we are transported from time period to time period in a non-chronological way, and in this form we gain our enjoyment. As Pratt has explained: "Indeed, the charm of time travel fiction often derives as much from narrative structure and philosophical approaches towards variable manners of being-in-time as from specific historical or imagined moments visited by the time travelers" ("Londons" 67). A reader is only able to get the "a-ha" moment at the very end of the story, when they realize that the Adversary is not the perceived villain that was previously imagined. The distinctions between the timeline of events and discourse of the story (how those events are presented in the text) make the difference between a so-so reading and something that really captures the imagination of individuals.

This is perhaps a time travel trait that is universal and not relegated solely to hard science fiction. Indeed, there are many examples of narration acting as a time machine for the reader. In *Cien años de soledad*, the story takes jumps forwards and backwards in the story, as in the very first page we are introduced to José Arcadio Buendía being lined up for execution by firing squad as he remembers the day in which his father took him to see ice for the first time. These fast-forwards and rewinds are what keep the story confusing some-times, allowing for the incongruencies between reality and subjectivity to occur to the reader. As Ricoeur explains:

> By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backward, as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, a plot establishes human action not only within time, as we said at the beginning of this section, but within memory. (180)

The revision of events that passed better help us come to an understanding of the story we just read. In *Tríptico de Dios*, there is a need to pause and reflect on the ending, as if the three parts of the novella were pieces of a time-paradox puzzle. This exercise is where we not only enjoy the cleverness of the writing, but divine deeper meanings from the text.

To conclude, we can see that the two Spanish stories looked at here, though different in narrative structures and objectives, can be read at varying levels of depth depending upon the reader's inclination. For "Mein Führer", the compli-

cations of time travel can offer either a simple story about complications in timeline alteration or a deep re-thinking of what it means to alter history and what impact that has on the perception of reality. For Tríptico de Dios, one can read it either as if it were a space romp with narratological twists and turns or a deeper treatise on what good and evil really constitute. Either can be read as entertainment or as treatises on philosophically challenging concepts regarding human experiences. These variations in reading are hallmarks of good writing, and they rely heavily upon their respective absurd interpretations of time travel in order for those variations to occur.

Simply put, absurdity should not be looked at as a type of negative trait that exposes itself only when "bad writing" happens. To the contrary, the most popular and cleverest of time travel fictions are based upon reality-defying impossibilities that captivate the imagination of the reader. Films such as *Back to the Future*, *The Terminator*, *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *The Butterfly Effect*, and *Looper* have been box office and critical successes largely because they play on the insanity of time travel, allowing it to be a sandbox for limitless possibilities. Novels such as *The Time Machine* are fan favorites for serious sf readers. These two particular offerings from Spain are in that same vein of enjoyment. Moreover, the elements that compose time travel stories are universal – people from around the world are fascinated by it, regardless of time travel being possible or not.

There is an element of escapism that makes absurdity attractive; logical explanations get boring, predictability becomes pedantic, and the regular pattern of existence becomes commonplace. Contrary to all the aforementioned examples in this article, there are several instances of time travel sf stories that get bogged down in trying to explainaway the science and logic behind it all. The film Timeline was a commercial flop in large part because of its long, drawn-out attempts at a scientific framework to undergird the movement of the story. One could argue (and rather successfully) that such explanations in any type of sf film or book could easily bore the audience, regardless of whether or not it was about time travel. Luckily, neither story mentioned in this article suffers from long discourses, as the writers recognize and respect the audience's expectations with time travel. The need to break free from constrictive and pre-scriptive writing is what probably motivates many writers to generate time travel stories in the first place. And for those who actually do end up writing and publishing those stories, the unfettering is wild and ferocious. Even "a most peculiar paradox" like time and its voyaging can go far beyond mere novelty and become a vital element to enjoy a good story.

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