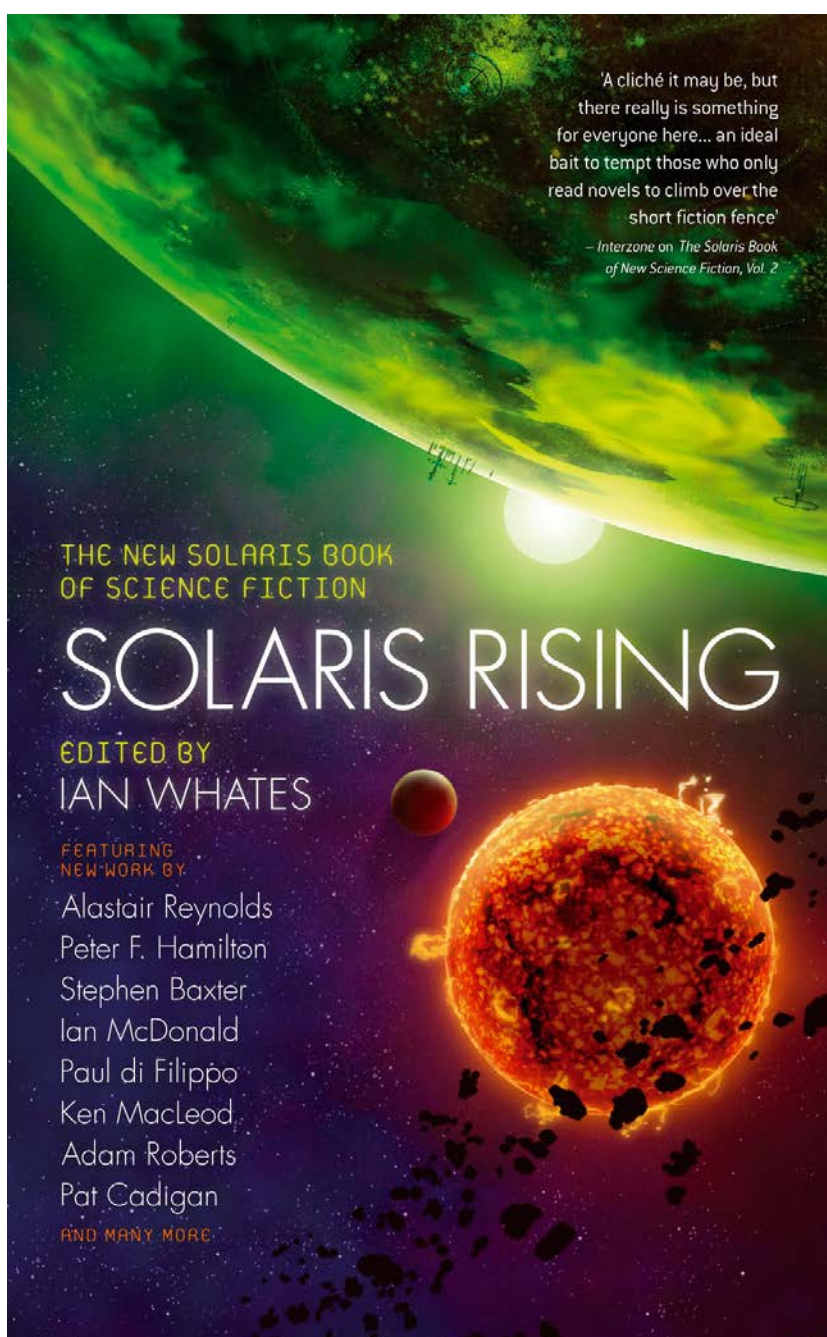


Yestermorrow was originally published in the anthology *Solaris Rising: The New Solaris Book of Science Fiction* back in 2011. I remain very proud of this story and the positive reviews it received. My thanks to editor Ian Whates and Jonathan Oliver at Solaris Books for allowing me to post this on my <http://www.richardsalter.com>. The cover was painted by Pye Parr.



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"For *Solaris Rising* I was seeking as diverse a mix of high quality science fiction as possible. In *Yestermorrow* Richard Salter provided me with a whole new dimension. A unique take on the time travel story that shows a police force having to adapt to very altered circumstances, featuring a central protagonist who is forced to face his own mortality. Add to that a perplexing murder mystery involving crimes that are theoretically impossible in this new order, and how could I resist? A cracking story."

-- *Ian Whates, editor of Solaris Rising.*

Yestermorrow

By Richard Salter

Monday June 5th, 2017

The man runs because his life depends on it. He does not want to be late--the fate of the universe hangs on him being in the right place at the right time. Or rather the wrong place at the wrong time. The streets of Brighton are pretty much deserted at this time of night. The only vehicles that pass are taxis or buses. He dashes across the road, not waiting for the lights to change. He doesn't even bother looking as he runs--the accident doesn't happen here.

He is running up St James's Street now, away from the Steine and towards the point of no return. He feels oddly nervous. No matter; this is where he is meant to be.

The uphill sprint makes his lungs heave and his chest ache but he does not fear a

heart attack. He pulls a tattered leaflet from his inside coat pocket, just to have it ready.

“Know Your Death Date!” is emblazoned across the cover.

At last he reaches Chapel Street. He glances at his mobile phone, notes that he still has five minutes. He collapses in a heap on the street corner, fighting for breath, not caring that he’s getting dirt on his jeans. He checks the date and time stamped inside the leaflet yet again, sets his mobile down on the pavement by his side and forces his breathing to calm down. This is his final day--the last day he will live through. He has known this day was coming for four years now--the leaflet only confirmed what he already knew. There’s no getting away from it. You can’t cheat death.

His time is up. He stands and balances on the curb, his mobile forgotten on the ground. He places the leaflet reverentially

back in his pocket and closes his eyes. He can hear the bus coming and knows what he must do. By his right foot, his mobile phone beeps an alarm. He takes a step forward.

A hand grabs his shoulder and yanks him back. He turns to face his saviour. “No, you don’t understand,” he says as the bus whizzes past him. The person who just saved his life has his face covered by a black hood. The masked rescuer drags the man onto Chapel Street, into the shadows. The man protests and struggles as he is thrown to the ground. He feels no pain as the blade slices through his chest, only surprise.

“This isn’t how I’m supposed to--”

Tuesday June 6th, 2017

The rain spatters off the pebbles as my boots crunch across the beach. It’s hard to walk with purpose when each step sinks

and slides. At the bottom of the rocky incline, the gently lapping waves spread out between the rocks, the water searching out countless paths to follow in its push onto land. Here the pebbles are darker and glisten from the constant wash of the tide.

The body lies slumped on its side, the feet and legs still encircled and released by each ebb and flow. Its posture and pallor resemble the carcass of a beached whale-- the flesh bloated and bleached white. I avert my gaze, scanning the promenade for police cruisers conspicuous by their absence. The APP should be all over this case like flies on a cow's arse, but instead they're stuffing their faces with egg McMuffins and cheap coffee.

Why should they hurry? They know this case will never be solved.

Maybe I can prove them wrong.

I crouch down and push aside the victim's shredded shirt with a gloved hand, examining the wounds. I've viewed the photos already, of course, but this is the earliest after death I will have a chance to see this. I reach into the inside pocket of the man's coat, pulling out a sodden pamphlet. I check the faded date, time and place stamped inside, barely readable now. "June 5th, 2017--3:05AM--St James's Street and Chapel Street, Brighton--Suicide--stepping in front of a bus."

One hour later the others show up. There is no crowd of gawkers to be dispersed--the murder is already old news. Jim Haggerty is making his overweight way down the sliding shingle slope towards me, coffee in one hand, the other outstretched to maintain his balance. He hasn't shaved, his hair is only vaguely combed and his tie hangs as limply as his dick probably does

when his wife can be bothered to try and wake it up. I can't stand this guy, will never be able to tolerate his unsanitary appearance and shitty attitude.

“What’s the rush?” he asks in that nasally whine of his. “Mr Parkhurst isn’t going nowhere.”

I ignore his butchering of basic grammar and turn to the body.

“Have you lived through the fifth yet?” I ask, while motioning for an APP photographer to approach.

“Yesterday? No.”

“When you do, can you be on Chapel Street at 3.05am and catch this fucker?”

“You know that would be against the rules.”

I turn on him angrily. “This guy doesn’t give a shit about the rules, so why should we?”

Haggerty spreads his arms wide innocently, spilling a little of his coffee onto the pebbles. “We’re the good guys,” he explains. “The damage this fuckhead is doing to the timelines is nothing compared to the heap of shit we’ll unleash if we try and stop him.”

I mutter something under my breath. That’s the problem with the Anti-Paradox Police--everything’s got to be played according to established history. Sets an example, the government says. If everybody did anything they liked, the universe would explode. How I would love to put that theory to the test.

Back when we were real policemen, back before the Slip, we’d have put this killer away in no time flat. I already know all trace of his DNA has been washed off by the water but there’s an obvious pattern to

these murders that would be his undoing if only our hands weren't tied.

The other officers are bagging up the body now. None of them is taking a lot of care to preserve the evidence.

Screw that. I don't have a whole lot of days left. If the killer can change history then so can I.

#

I get home late this evening and Laura is mad at me, which is kind of her default state anyway. Usually she spends her time coming up with new reasons to hate my guts. It's not like I don't provide a ton of justification.

"I'm sorry. I was working on the Parkhurst case."

"Why? Why waste time on a case you can't crack? I swear you're just looking for an excuse to stay away from home."

“I’m doing this so I’ll have *more* time at home.”

“Jason’s asleep now, so that’s another day you won’t be spending with him. I know you don’t want to be with me, but for fuck’s sake, Craig, are you such a heartless bastard that you can’t spend what time you have left with your son?”

I don’t answer. She doesn’t understand. She’s like all the others, blindly doing what she’s told, living every day according to how things are supposed to be. Exasperated, she announces she’s off to bed and heads upstairs. After I hear the door to our bedroom close I creep into Jason’s room and watch him sleeping. His body is four years old but I wonder how old his mind is. How many days in the future has he lived without me? If I’d spent any time with him today I might know by now.

Am I robbing him of time with me by
obsessing over my death?

As quietly as I can, I pull out a leaflet
from my pocket. "Know Your Death Date!"
it says on the front. I don't have to look
inside to know that fateful date and time,
but I do anyway. I know it's right because I
haven't lived through any days beyond
Monday.

If time still flowed linearly, I'd be dead
in six days.

Thursday January 15th 2015

I awaken to the sound of my alarm and
immediately crack open my diary to find out
what day it is. The leather bookmark
indicates that today is January 15th. I read
yesterday's entry, as I always do, where I've
written some details about what's going on
in my life right now. This helps me catch up
quickly--everyone does this if they want to

stand a chance of keeping track. Tonight before the Switch, I will enter details about what happened today. So far, all today's entry says is that the swearing in ceremony for all APP officers is this afternoon. I've been dreading this day for quite some time. It feels weird to be starting a job I've already been doing for a while. Everyone has to start somewhere.

All across the country during this time period, pre-Slip police forces are converting into APP units. Crimes don't require a whole lot of investigation these days. The future doesn't just tell us who the perp is, it also tells us how long they'll spend in jail.

I enter the station, careful to avoid the myriad folks setting up this afternoon's ceremony. On one side of the lobby a huddle of officers is trying to calm Haggerty down. He is pretty distraught.

“What’s going on?” he wails. “I lost two years, two fucking years of my life. Don’t you people understand? Was I in a coma? What the fuck?” The other officers attempt to explain it to him and he launches into another tirade. “What are you talking about? What’s the Slip? You telling me I spent two years wearing some bird’s nightie?”

“Different kind of Slip, Jim,” Sarge says from behind the desk.

I wave to him as I walk by. “Noob day?” I ask, nodding my head towards Haggerty.

Sarge nods his head. “Happened to us all.”

I can’t help but laugh. Great day to get as his first after the Slip. He’ll have to understand life in general before he can possibly grasp what his new job is. Last night in his own timeline, Haggerty went to bed on Tuesday February 19th 2013--the day

before the most important date in human history--with no concept of the Slip, no idea what happens at midnight every day, not an inkling of what it means to live your life out of order. I remember my first day post-Slip. I jumped straight to a warm summer day in 2015. It took me about twenty days bouncing around inside my own lifetime before I got to grips with the idea that time no longer works by lining up days in a reasonable order. Most people get used to it surprisingly quickly. Some never do. Some go mad waiting to live a day before that fateful Wednesday, but nobody jumps to a date pre-Slip. That's not how it works.

#

That afternoon, the ceremony goes without a hitch and everyone on the former police force becomes APP. "Stop the Paradox, Save the Universe!"--the slogan is

bandied about carelessly throughout the festivities. To me it rings hollow.

Haggerty is laughing with his APP mates now. He seems to have grown accustomed to the idea pretty damn fast. He's one of the lucky ones. That'll help him a lot when he wakes up tomorrow and finds he's eighty-five years old, living in a nursing home and unable to pee all day until suddenly his bladder explodes. Okay, that's an exaggeration, I'm sure. Haggerty probably embellished the story. Still, lucky that wasn't his Noob day. Confused as hell and unable to pee--can you think of a worse way to start a new life?

Thursday June 8th, 2017

This coffee sucks! Why do I come here? Every fucking day I sit here in this café with Haggerty before we start work. Even on weekends. Haggerty's wife hates him more

than Laura hates me. We hate each other, we hate this café and we hate the coffee. But it's familiar. It's routine. It's something we do automatically, regardless of what day this is. Routine is what stops us from going psycho. Everyone's the same--that's why I know every person in this place by name. Like *Groundhog Day*, except *everyone* feels as if they're living the same day again and again.

We all crave the same things: stability, order, meaning.

But this is June 8th. In four days (as the clock flies) I will be dead. My opportunities to catch the killer are running out.

"How many times has this guy killed?"

Haggerty grimaced as he sipped his coffee. "You still on this? Jeez, let it go."

"Indulge me, I don't have long to live."

"Bullshit. I bet you have a ton of days left to live before Monday."

To be honest, I'd lost track. Some people, Haggerty included, kept a memorized tally of how many days they'd lived through and could work out how many days they had left. I gave up doing that a while back--the numbers involved were too depressingly small.

"How many times?"

Haggerty sighs, which turns into a belch. "Fuck, whatever. Assuming it's the same guy, Ten. Or maybe eleven. Lessee, linearly speaking, three before Parkhurst. Seven follow him. Or is it five?"

"How many have you lived through?"

"All three of the ones in the past, two of the ones in the future. I think. I don't remember."

"You know why you don't remember?"

"No, why?"

"Because you're a dick."

"Funny."

“Seriously though, don’t you think it’s weird?”

Haggerty signals for the waitress. “We all know we never catch the guy so to be honest I don’t lose a lot of sleep over it.”

While my partner orders another coffee and a Danish, I ponder my options.

#

“We’re supposed to be responding to a call!” Haggerty wheezes. I ignore him, climbing the steps to the Brighton Archive two at a time. The converted 19th century building stands opposite the Royal Pavilion and once housed shops and apartments. Now, the entire complex is given over to a massive storage facility.

“Nuts to the call,” I reply.

“His wife is convinced he’s going to bottle out of topping himself at 11.20am. That’s in thirty minutes. We’ve got to make

sure he steps off the ledge. Carter, wait up!”

I’m not listening. Instead I wave my APP badge at the guards and they let me through to the security check. Haggerty is close behind; his breathing is annoying me. Getting him to quit smoking and lose some weight is impossible of course, since that’s not what’s going to kill him so why should he stop?

I stride up to the reception desk. “I need to see the Chief Librarian,” I say to the diminutive lady polishing her nails.

“Would a ‘please’ kill you?” she asks, not looking up.

“I’m APP. The Librarian, *please*.”

She looks me in the eye and straightens, putting down the little bottle and brush. One cool side effect of being an APP officer: people respect those who are

technically allowed to change history, even if we rarely do.

“Certainly, Sir. I’ll have him paged. And can I ask, Sir...?”

“What?”

She whispers conspiratorially, “Can you get me a job at the APP? Something in admin is fine. It’s just that this place is so dull. Every day is exactly the same.”

“Some people like that,” Haggerty says, having finally caught his breath.

“Not me,” she replies. “I want to do something with my life.”

I stare at her. “Do you get a job at the APP?”

“Well, no. Not that I’ve seen yet.”

“So you’re asking me to change history for you?” My tone is slightly threatening.

She straightens some papers. “Of course not. What gave you that impression? Here he is!”

A tall, middle-aged gentleman dressed in scholar's robes and carrying a huge ledger under his arm descends the stairs to the lobby. He seems distracted, annoyed at the interruption. He approaches the front desk.

"What is it? I'm very busy, it had better be important."

"My colleague here has only lived a few days since the Slip so he's never seen your facilities before. I wonder if you'd be so good as to show us around."

Haggerty is about to protest so I flash him a look, silencing him.

"I'm far too busy for this interruption. Let me find someone junior-"

"We were rather hoping you would do the honours, since there's nobody more knowledgeable about the Archive."

He looks horrified at the prospect.

"What? Me? Oh very well."

#

“You live here, at the Archive, right?”

“Yes, yes, what of it?”

I follow the Chief Librarian through a set of double doors into a room filled with desks and workers. There isn't a single computer in the room, just people and furniture and endless shelves heaped with stacks and stacks of diaries and pamphlets and ledgers.

“Nothing, just impressed at your dedication to the job,” I tell him.

He turns on me. He's no spring chicken, but he's imposing nonetheless. “Job? This is not a job! It is my life! I keep records of everything. Without me, without this Archive, how would people know for sure when they are going to die? How will they know when to conceive their children or quit a job or break their leg? How can we be

sure that history will run according to plan?”

“Well, quite. So where do you sleep?”

“Fourth floor,” he replies. “And no I will not show you my apartment.”

“Fifteen minutes to the suicide,”

Haggerty tells me in a stage whisper.

“And in here,” the Librarian continues, soldiering on, “we have the most dedicated staff in the region. On this side of the room, workers memorize details of what has happened today, so the next time they live a day in the past they can record those details. On the other side of the room, our workers record their memories from the future so that pamphlets can be sent out in good time. The next room I’ll show you is where we process the pamphlets.”

“What’s that book you’re carrying?” I ask.

The Chief Librarian freezes in his tracks.

“This? This is my personal ledger.” He seems uncomfortable discussing it.

“And what’s it for?”

“For? What’s it for? Well, I record things of course.”

“What, specifically?”

“Well, at a high level, every major event from each day that has been memorized from the future, and every major event that actually happens today. I use it to check and validate everything that is recorded and every pamphlet that is sent out. We must be sure our details are accurate.”

“Absolutely. That’s a lot of work, though?”

“Indeed. Which is why, gentlemen, I must ask you to leave now. I am a very busy man.”

“Of course, we’ll leave you alone.

Thank you for the tour.”

On our way out, I stop by the receptionist again.

“I’d like to send the Chief Librarian a token of my thanks. Any suggestions? Does he drink?”

The receptionist chuckles. “Like a fish,” she says. “He’s very partial to scotch. Single malt. Better make it a large bottle or else he’ll finish it in one evening.”

“And when should I have it delivered by?”

“As long as it gets here by 6pm you’re golden.”

“Thanks, Miss...?”

“Bridges. Helen Bridges.”

“Thank you, Miss Bridges. I’ll put in a good word for you at the APP.”

#

“What was that about?” Haggerty asks once we’re outside. “We’ve missed the suicide. I bloody hope he went through with it or we’re in a shitload of trouble.”

“That ledger--you always see him carrying it around when he’s shown on the TV Reminder Reports. He’s never shown anyone the contents.”

“Why do you care?”

“Anyone with access to that ledger is potentially our killer,” I explain.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Haggerty argues. “It doesn’t take much effort to find out when someone is going to die.”

“No, but to know precisely enough to step in at the last moment and kill them yourself. That takes a very detail-oriented mind.”

“You think the Chief Librarian is the killer?”

“Think about it. Why is this guy never caught?”

“Because he just isn’t. We... I’d remember it.”

“It’s more than that. It’s because he knows exactly whom he can kill with impunity. He targets those who are going to die alone and he knows where they will be and at exactly what time. But he cares about history, don’t you see?”

“Cares? Why do you say that?”

“Because he’s only killing people who are going to die anyway.”

“Surely that’s just so he can cover his tracks.”

“That’s part of it, but I think he believes that if you’re about to die, you’re fair game.”

Wednesday February 20th, 2013

Today is Day One and everyone is happy.

Breaking the habit of a lifetime, I skip the café and just go for a walk along Western Road. It feels like the day after a massive storm, like the power is out and nobody can get to work or even turn on a television. There's a sense of community, camaraderie, as if we're all in this together.

There's no panic, no rioting. Day One is like a national holiday. With the exception of those having the most confusing Noob Day imaginable, everyone else has already lived days beyond this one. They all know what the Slip was; they all know that at midnight, every night, the Switch will happen and it'll be some other day, a random day of their life.

But today is different. As I pass by, everyone smiles and says hello. Everyone

knows the rules, but the rules haven't been put in place yet. Everyone knows that they will soon be getting pamphlets telling them when to fuck, when to buy a car, when to die. But not today. The Archive hasn't been set up yet. The APP doesn't exist. The government hasn't locked down Britain's borders, imposed martial law or abolished the election process yet. They did shut off access to the internet beyond Britain's borders though, that was done pretty fast. Nobody knew they *could* do that until it happened.

Still, today everyone feels free.

In reality, we're no freer today than any other day of our lives post-Slip. But it feels as if we are.

I'm tempted to get on a plane while I still can and head for Mexico. Rumours are that while North America, Europe and most of Asia go into lockdown just like Britain,

some countries--especially in Latin America and Africa--just go with the flow. Whatever will be, will be. Kind of makes a mockery of the whole, "Don't change history or the universe will explode" concept.

It's a fair walk back to the Seven Dials and my house. Laura greets me at the door, Jason in her arms. I take him from her and kiss his head. I've heard it said that when your mind is that of an adult and you wake up one morning as a baby, you don't remember any of it. I wouldn't know because I was already an adult when the Slip happened. I look into Jason's eyes and I see... something there. Will he remember me?

To my surprise, Laura leans over and kisses me so passionately I feel compelled to avert Jason's innocent eyes. He coos uncomprehendingly.

"What was that for?" I ask Laura.

“It’s Day One,” she says, as if that explains everything.

Everyone seems in a good mood today.

I ask hopefully, “Is it time for his nap?”

#

Afterwards, we lie together and enjoy the silence of the bedroom. Mercifully, Jason hasn’t stirred in nearly an hour. We know we don’t have long now before he wakes.

“Tell me about Jason,” I say. “Will he be a doctor?”

“No. A musician.”

“Really? Cool! Anyone I might know?”

“Heard of Pagan?”

“Yeah!” I sit bolt upright. “You’re shitting me! Really? Wow. I heard people talking about this Pagan guy and wow, he’s huge! Never put two and two together before.”

“Jason plays bass in Pagan’s band.”

“Oh. Well, that’s still pretty cool.”

She sits up. Her body, trapped in linear time like everyone else’s, displays the legacy of motherhood. Her breasts are swollen and her nipples are tender from feeding a voracious baby. Her once smooth stomach is now wrinkled with stretch marks and excess skin. Bags beneath her eyes betray the sleepless nights she has endured. She has never looked more beautiful to me.

“I do love you,” I tell her. Right now it’s the truth.

“I know. I hate what the Slip has done to us but I don’t hate you.”

I hold her tight. I know the baby will cry at any moment. He may well have lived two thousand days of his life already, but very soon he’s going to need a feeding and a nappy change.

I promise Laura that in the days I live after this one, I will try to be nicer to her, and spend more time with Jason.

She holds me a little tighter.

“Bass player for Pagan? Really?”

She laughs. “I know. He’s quite well off too, so you don’t have to worry about the four of us after you’re gone.”

My blood runs cold. “Four?”

“I mean two. The two of us. Jason and me.” Laura turns pale.

I stand up, not caring that I’m naked, not bothering to keep my voice down.

“You said four.”

She stands up and starts to dress, her head bowed. “I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“That’s why our marriage is a failure. That’s why I always get the cold shoulder from you. That’s why Jason looks at me oddly when he’s old enough to wonder who I am. I kept waiting for the day when you’d

tell me why our marriage is failing, but I wasn't going to find out, was I? You fucking whore!"

"You expect me to stay a widow for the rest of my life?"

"No! But... shit. Four? So you have another kid with him, right? Boy or girl?"

"Craig, please..."

"Boy or girl?" The baby is crying now.

"A girl," Laura whimpers.

"And what's his name?" I don't want to know; I *have* to know.

"David. I meet him a year after you die. I'm not unfaithful while you're alive!"

"Bullshit!" I'm screaming now. I'm flying out of control. I'm so mad I can barely see straight. I want to smash something.

"Each day you're with me--the next day you're with him! Then you're back with me again, but I'm no *David*, am I? You can't wait to get through the days with me so you

can be back with him. Am I right?" I yell the last question again. "Am I right?"

She is in tears now, wanting to tend to the baby but I'm standing between her and the door.

"So these years post-Slip you're living through with me before I croak--they're just an inconvenience. They're just something to burn through until you can be with my replacement and your two perfect kids and..." I tail off. "Dear God. Jason calls him Daddy."

Laura is shaking her head now, trembling.

"He calls that *fuck*, 'Daddy', doesn't he? I'm dead and gone, and that *fucker* knocks you up and moves in and steals *my* son!"

She stands, her fists clenched. "Listen to me. I have a lot more days to live than you do so cut me some slack, okay?"

But I'm not listening. Laura is already lost to me, has been since this crazy jumping in time shit started. Now at least I know why, I'm the stopgap in the way of the real love of her life. What really kills me, what eats at the very core of my being, is that my son doesn't know what to call me because he already has a dad. I can't believe how self-absorbed I've been that I never stopped to think about this before.

"How come I don't already know this?"

I demand. "Why didn't anybody tell me?"

"I asked everyone you know not to tell you my future. I didn't think you'd be able to handle it."

"Too fucking right I can't handle it! My God, my wife is having a... a trans-temporal affair, and my kid doesn't think I'm his dad!"

Today was set to be the best day of my life since the Slip. Now it's the worst.

Wednesday June 7th, 2017

I've been itching to get back to this final week of my life for so long. I've lived what must be months in my own timeline subsequent to Day One. Since then I've not even been able to look Laura in the eye. Sometimes she knows why, sometimes she doesn't. I idly wonder if my attitude towards her since finding out about David is actually the cause of the divisions between us, but I dismiss those worries because she'll have known she ends up with David long before our marriage breaks down. It makes my head hurt thinking about it, so I don't. I have one goal now. Just one.

Waiting all day is agonizing. I join Haggerty on some APP calls but I'm barely there. I coast through our talk with a guy who refuses to give all his money to charity. In his hand is a pamphlet, "Miscellaneous

Actions” written on the front. Haggerty is telling him that, like it or not, on this day he will give his favourite charity all his money. It’s always happened, it always will happen. When he still won’t do it, Haggerty makes the transfer himself, ignoring the man’s protests.

But I don’t care.

Just one goal.

Darkness falls at last. I tell Haggerty I have to go home but instead I head for the Archive. Over the last few months in my own timeline, I’ve found every excuse to come down here and study the security layout of the building. The Archive is well protected but break-ins are so rare now that the guards almost never see action, and when they do they all know it’s going to happen. Consequently they are bored, indifferent and easily avoided.

8pm. Right on cue, the guards change shift. As usual, the team clocking off congregates on the front steps, waiting for their replacements to arrive. I'm already on the other side of the building, crouching and staring at my watch. 8.10pm, the cutover occurs. That's when the new shift reactivates the alarm system in case any of the sensors need resetting. That means the whole system is down for 35 seconds. I use that time to smash a hole in a basement window with a well-wrapped arm and slide inside.

It doesn't take long to get up to the fourth floor. I know the motion sensors are down tonight because three weeks ago I used my APP override pass to book a remote maintenance upgrade for tonight. Strictly speaking, while APP officers are authorized to change history, it's only

supposed to be a last resort. I say screw that.

I break into the Chief Librarian's apartment with ease. He's sleeping soundly because two weeks ago I arranged to have a large bottle of whisky sent to his rooms. Expensive enough so that he wouldn't put off opening it; not so expensive he might save it for a special occasion. The bottle stands empty on a table and the snoring can be heard throughout the apartment.

I find the ledger on his bedside table. I consider for a moment looking for the murder weapon but he's unlikely to keep it here.

Instead, I open the ledger to the entries for this week. Each day has been allocated two facing pages allocated, full of names, dates and details. The left-hand page bears the relevant day's date. Beyond today the

details are a little sketchier but not by much.

I turn to June 5th. Sure enough, there's Parkhurst. Nothing about his entry stands out, but the Librarian wouldn't be stupid enough to circle and highlight his next victim. I spend some time reading the details for the days I have not yet lived through after June 5th. There's not much point in looking at days before that--I already know they contain no other victims. Frustratingly, I don't see any candidates. I'm looking for people who die alone, but there's nobody. Nobody until the 12th, anyway. I spot one likely candidate, details inked onto the right-hand page in perfect handwriting. With a sinking feeling, I realize that there's really only one potential victim before I die.

Me.

#

“What the hell do you want?”

My boss doesn't sound happy. It's late now, 10.30pm. Mobile phone held to my ear, I'm crouched in a bathroom on the third floor of the Archive, hoping that nobody will hear me. I don't want to whisper because that may tip off my boss that I'm somewhere I shouldn't be. I mumble something about my kid being asleep and talk as loudly as I dare.

“Chief, listen to me. I think I can catch Parkhurst's killer.”

“Jeez, are you still on this? We never catch him! Let it go.”

“Sir, I don't have long to live, linearly speaking. Just indulge me.”

There's a long suffering sigh on the other end of the line. “Fine, what do you want to do?”

“On the 12th of June, at the time that I die, I want a dozen APP officers watching me, in hiding.”

“Uh uh, Carter. You die alone. I saw your pamphlet. Not even the APP can change that.”

“I’m not asking you to change anything about how I die. I just want our people there in case... in case I’m the next victim.”

“You think the killer would dare attack an APP?”

“Why should he care what my job is? All he cares about is that I die alone, early in the morning, in an exposed location. Doesn’t matter if I’m APP, he knows we won’t break the rules even for one of our own.”

“It’s out of the question, Carter. I’m sorry.”

He hangs up. I sit with my back against the tiled wall beside a row of sinks, head in

my hands, wondering what the hell I'm going to do. And then I know.

Sunday June 11th 2017

According to my pamphlet, I'll be walking through Brunswick Square early on the morning of the 12th. 3am to be exact. It's nearly 3am now, but I'm here a day early. On the evening of the 10th, Laura had asked me why I set my alarm so early for the next day. I told her that the day before I die, I want to walk through the streets of Brighton and especially around the place where I'll die. I tell her it's my period of mourning for my own life. She doesn't understand but she doesn't argue.

So here I am. It's cold, colder than it should be in summer. I wonder if global warming is to blame--then I realize that I've never actually asked anyone who lives longer than I do if global warming turns out

to be real or not. I make a mental note to do so before I reach the 12th and I've used up all my days. In fact, there's an awful lot of stuff about the future I've never asked anybody.

I sit down on a bench and watch a taxi drive around the perimeter of the square and exit onto Brunswick Terrace.

Hands grab me.

I struggle, fighting back as my attacker pulls me over the back of the bench. I land hard on the grass, knocking the wind out of my lungs. He's wearing a hood--I grasp at it to try and pull it free. A knife swings towards my gut but I twist out of its way, holding his arm and trying to wrest the weapon free. We roll over and over on the grass, both of us struggling to gain the upper hand.

Suddenly he is pulled off me. Strong hands lift me to my feet.

APP officers. Three of them are holding the struggling perp.

Haggerty takes off the hood.

The Chief Librarian.

“Got you.”

He spits at Haggerty. “You’re breaking the rules!” He cries. “You can’t all be here at the time of his death.”

I chuckle. “It isn’t the time of my death,” I say. “You’re a day early.”

He stares at me now, no longer struggling. “What?”

“It’s not Monday, it’s still Sunday. I tore a page out of your ledger, the left hand page for June 12th. I made the entries on the right-hand page for the 12th look like they occur on June 11th.”

“What? When?”

“I broke into the Archive several days ago and found out I’d be your next victim, so I made you think I’d die tonight instead

of tomorrow. That way all my friends here could accompany me without breaking any rules. Well, no major ones anyway. Barry here is supposed to be trying for a baby. How's that going, Barry?"

"It'll happen," says Barry, twisting the Librarian's arm a little higher behind his back. "I doubt being here this morning will change that."

"So there you go, Mr Chief Librarian. No harm done to the precious timelines. Although what catching you will do to history, I've no idea. Maybe the universe will explode."

"You have to let me go! I'm not supposed to be caught!"

"Nope, but in special circumstances, APP Officers are authorized to deviate from established history to serve the public interest. I don't know how many people you were going to kill after tonight, but I reckon

if those people die the way they're supposed to it'll more than balance any damage done by throwing your sorry arse behind bars."

Haggerty steps forward. "Chief Librarian Thomas Hague, you are under arrest for gross-divergence from the established time line, at least three counts of murder and for assaulting an APP officer. You have the right to remain silent but anything you say today or at any time in the future may be used in court against you. Take him to the station, lads."

Cursing and spitting, the Librarian is dragged away, leaving Haggerty and me alone.

"Fuck me!" says Haggerty. "You did it."

Monday June 12th 2017

I sit alone on the same bench I sat on yesterday--well not yesterday for me, but

yesterday as the world turns--in Brunswick Square. It is warmer tonight, but a gentle breeze flows from the waterfront and cools the air. I remember very clearly the arrest of the Chief Librarian in this very spot yesterday. I feel absolutely fine, even though my time is nearly up. I will die alone and in the future a man called David will be called daddy by my son. Catching the Librarian has proved that the future can be changed--the media woke up to that revelation in a big way--but there's no escaping the aneurism that will take my life. I spent the day in hospital having more tests done, even though the law forbids a person from attempting to avert their own death. The doctors are less bothered by the rules these days. Things have changed, for everyone. They haven't all changed at the same rate, on the same days. It's been a gradual thing, but in the days I've lived since

Sunday, I've noticed. Every day since then I've spent either in the hospital trying to find a way to cheat death, or with Laura and Jason. I've told them everything, I've tried to put David out of my mind, and I've managed to enjoy what little time I had left with my son.

Ultimately the doctors couldn't help. They couldn't do anything about the problem with my brain. It was worth a shot though.

"I hear you've been changing history again."

It's Haggerty. He shuffles over and sits down on the bench next to me, wheezing slightly. I can't help but smile.

"You're not supposed to be here," I say.

"Nobody should die alone."

"What's it like now? The future I mean?"

“Well you must have seen some of it in the past. It’s uncertain, weird. I don’t remember many details, too many things changing. I only remember the linear-past for certain. I suppose that’s how it always used to be. Makes life more interesting, that’s for damn sure. Nobody bothers with the pamphlets any more. The Archives have all been shut down. The Chief Librarian gets life, I know that for sure. Apparently he killed twenty people before the Slip.

Afterwards he stopped for a while but then worked out a way he could carry on. An addiction the psychiatrists call it. Fucking psycho if you ask me. We have to be careful that when he lives days before he got caught, he doesn’t try to kill anybody again. He may be the first person to be retroactively arrested!”

He is quiet for a moment and then says, “I’m sorry you won’t be at the trial.”

I shrug my shoulders. "It's okay. I'm fine with it, really. I made a difference, what else can anybody hope for?"

"S true."

"One thing I still want to change though..."

"Jesus, leave history alone already. What's it done to you?"

"No seriously, one more thing."

"What?"

"Next time you see me can you suggest we go somewhere with better coffee?"

Haggerty laughs. "Sure," he says. "I can do that."

"So I guess I'll see you yestermorrow," I tell him.

"Yestermorrow. I like that. Sure. See you then."

We sit in silence for a full minute.

My watch starts beeping.

Then, like a light switch, my brain turns
off.

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