

# Dreams of Reversible Days

by Björn Franke

They came after the collapse, sifting through ruins not for survival, but for continuity. They came to be known as the Engineers, though they were more like mystics—scribes of entropy, readers of lost schematics buried in half-decayed servers. They did not rebuild the world; they cataloged the remnants of those who tried to escape it.

Time, for them, was never about hours, clocks, or harvests. It was something more profound—an architecture of hidden passageways and secret stairwells of causality. What follows are fragments from their recovered manuals, dream diagrams, and philosophical blueprints. All are incomplete. All were once believed.

## The Chair Beneath the Clocktower

A chair bolted to a trembling axis, surrounded by a gilded cage of gears and translucent plates. The manual speaks of a singularity of stillness: the traveler's body is inert while the world unspools like a reel of film, blurring forward or collapsing into its own infancy. Control is illusory, dependent on intuition and brass levers. It did not navigate space, only memory. They say it was used only once. When it vanished, it took with it the clock tower it had been built beneath.<sup>1</sup>

## The Velocity Catalyst

It attempted to marry velocity with vision. The machine was vehicular—a steel-skinned ghost, retrofitted with something called a flux capacitor: a trinity-shaped conduit for harnessing improbability. To traverse time, it required movement, precisely 88 miles per hour, at which point ignition occurred in the chronology itself. It was elegant in its absurdity: forward momentum producing retrograde outcomes. Most attempts failed. Some succeeded too well, scattering the travelers across timelines like shrapnel.<sup>2</sup>

## The Box That Sang

Blueprints recovered from fractured spacefolds reference a sentient capsule—a paradox in form, smaller outside than within. Its structure was organic, or pseudo-mechanical, pulsing with a blue hum. It responded not to coordinates but to need, memory, and even guilt. Piloting it was more performance than science, with levers that resisted and switches that seemed to judge. Some claimed it was grown rather than built. Others spoke of dreams in which it arrived unbidden, offering passage. It always left before proof could follow.<sup>3</sup>

## The Reversible Pendant

A necklace, light as breath, bearing a micro-hourglass no larger than a seed. It did not move one through time—it rotated one's presence backward while the world played out its earlier self. No futures could be altered, only synchronized. Travelers reported nausea, *déjà vu*, and the sensation of being seen by oneself. It was regulated, then outlawed. The last known traveler vanished into a locked room already exited.<sup>4</sup>

## The Stolen Orb

This device was stolen rather than built—pried from the clockwork heart of a cosmic entity known only as Time. Spherical, suspended in gyroscopic equilibrium, it enabled traversal across an ocean of time, a conceptual space shaped by currents and undertows. Users did not guide it; they submitted. There were reports of travelers returning decades older, speaking in anachronistic tongues, bearing relics from uninhabitable futures.<sup>5</sup>

## The Ring of Fire

It was industrial, brutal, and purely functional. A naked traveler, skin to vacuum, sent through a burning ring of stabilized spacetime. No machinery could pass through—only organic material encased in bioelectric fields. It was not a vehicle but a cannon. Targets were coordinates, not destinations. It assumed inevitability: the traveler must land where history demanded rupture. Most landings resulted in war.<sup>6</sup>

## Syndrome 43-H

It was more a disorder than a machine. The body, destabilized by trauma or genetics, would vanish—mid-

step, midkiss—leaving behind only clothing and confusion. Travelers would reappear at random points along their own timeline, sometimes unable to change anything, occasionally unable not to. It was deterministic, romantic, and cruel. The syndrome could be inherited. Love was its only constant.<sup>7</sup>

## The Syntax of Sorrow

A perfectly carved door, impossibly old. One side led to the past, the other to understanding. The traveler stepped through and found repetition, not escape—events relived rather than revised. The machine was linguistic, inscribed with nested stories, each turning inward like a spiral. Altering the past did not erase sorrow; it only revealed its architecture. It was a narrative-bound causality: for every lesson learned, a path was returned. Some travelers vanished mid-sentence. Others emerged older, speaking in parables. The final inscription above the gate read: *Nothing erodes like an untold choice.*<sup>8</sup>

## The Spinning Tower

Theoretically perfect, physically impossible. An infinite cylinder spinning near the speed of light, warping spacetime into a loop. Calculations show that a

vessel navigating its axis in a precise spiral could re-enter its own past. No such cylinder was ever built; it would require more matter than the known universe. Some models suggest the universe itself may be a failed prototype, slowly spinning toward its own creation.<sup>9</sup>

## The Coil and the Coffin

Compact and unassuming. Two coils, a field, and a delay. Entry occurred at noon, exit followed at 6 a.m.—in the past. To achieve this, the traveler must remain inside for six hours of stasis, breathing recycled air and contemplating what must not be changed. The math worked. The ethics did not. Duplication was inevitable. Identity became a hypothesis. At least one traveler is said to have been found arguing with a double in the mirror, having lost track of who the original was.<sup>10</sup>

## Prototype 31

This machine ran on narrative. It was never observed, only described. Travelers fed it their life stories, which the device used to calculate destinations of unresolved meaning. Time travel was not chronological but semantic. To repair the past, one must first edit

the self. Most travelers became trapped in recursive storytelling loops. The final directive found in the device's memory read: *You are not where you were. You are not yet who you are. Try again.*<sup>11</sup>

## The Fixed Gaze

A unit built from war debris and memory. The subject was strapped in, eyes open, forced to stare into the light of a moment not yet real. It was the gaze that traveled, not the body. The past was an image, the future a dream. Time was navigated through the trauma of a single remembered instant—a woman at an airport, a boy watching himself die. This machine never worked on the willing. It required longing.<sup>12</sup>

## The Leaper's Seed

A smooth, walnut-sized device, activated by a single, instinctive leap. In that fleeting moment, the world blurs as the traveler is cast forward, lost in the currents of time—a collection of fragile moments, each waiting to be disturbed. Instead of steering, the traveler surrenders to the jump, letting desire shape the course. Each leap spins a new thread into the fabric of possibility, and with it, the past shifts like the faintest whisper. The leaps were always taken in

ignorance, the destination unknown in time and place.<sup>13</sup>

## The Splice Directive

A surgical intervention, precise and irreversible: a death forestalled not by medicine, but by the excision of a moment from the reel of life. Time becomes a filmstrip—cut, spliced, rethreaded by hands that do not tremble. The machine's form is never described, only its effect. Perhaps it exists less as a device and more as a pact. A gambler's debt rewound. A dying breath held in escrow. Some believed the traveler lived forever in borrowed seconds; others whispered that history charged interest in blood.<sup>14</sup>

## The Sutures and Syntax

A tool of transcription, etched with keys and teeth. Time is treated as text still wet with ink: editable, mutable, dangerously alive. The traveler edits time instead of riding it: striking through pain, rewriting selves into safer shapes. Gender, identity, chronology—none of these were fixed. To travel was to redact. What survives of the machine is described as a cross between a typewriter and a cauterized wound. Most who used it erased more than they restored.



The last known operator vanished mid-sentence, before the revision was complete.<sup>15</sup>

### The Leaper's Error

The traveler was unmoored, not displaced in body but in soul—cast into others, wearing their lives like borrowed clothes. The machine was said to be vast, subterranean, perhaps broken. Or perhaps it worked perfectly, misunderstanding salvation as a form of penance. Each leap was into a life not one's own, each return uncertain. The only guide: a flickering hologram of memory, logic wrapped in static. Some said the travelers were correcting history. Others believed they were dissolving into it. None could return home, having become someone else entirely.<sup>16</sup>

### The Folded Field

A wound in space shaped like a silo, crude and industrial, its interior filled with pink liquid like the embryonic sac of a future self. The traveler enters not out of curiosity but by accident, a voyeur punished by causality. There is no navigation, only repetition. To step inside is to become one's own antagonist. Time loops out of error rather than grandeur. It was known only as a trap disguised as atonement.<sup>17</sup>

## The Precise Crossing

Time is not reversed, only one's relation to it. The mechanism, violent and radioactive, turns entropy against itself, sending the traveler backward through a world that is still moving forward. Breathing becomes difficult. Fire freezes. Cause trails after effect like smoke. Each crossing demanded impossible precision. Morality fractured around it: every bullet unfired is also one already shot. Some claimed the universe would compensate. Others warned that walking against time is not the same as understanding it. One traveler seems to have returned aged in reverse, with lungs full of future ash.<sup>18</sup>

## The Ouroboros Diary

A device without exterior form, its mechanism embedded not in wires, but in biography. The travelers passed through the architecture of their own becoming. Identity ceased to be linear; it folded, repeated, and rewrote itself. The machine did not transport the travelers through time—it rethreaded them, looping through origin points until cause and consequence became indistinguishable. Some claimed the device required only a subject and a moment of choice. Others argued it was language itself that activated the recursion: a name spoken out of order, a pronoun mis-

used. A diary was found in triplicate, each version written in a different tense, all signed with the same indecipherable mark. The final page read: *This is where I begin, again.*<sup>19</sup>

## The Map of Theft

Time was neither tool nor terror; it was a terrain to be plundered. The portal was crude: a rip in chronology discovered, not designed. A ragged crew used it to collect—gods, relics, and wealth from unguarded moments. The machine was a crude cube, larger on the inside, stitched together with stolen logic. Navigation was anarchic, mistakes accumulated like rust. One traveler claimed they saw the end of time, and it resembled a ledger: debits written in stars, credits in ash. The cube was found beneath the ruins, its interior echoing with laughter that had yet to occur.<sup>20</sup>

## The Memory Engine

The machine did not move the body, but revised the soul—extracting memory like teeth, stitching new ones in their place. Time is plastic; events are rewritten by forgetting. The travelers sought to forget grief. When they woke, they wept without knowing why. Some questioned whether this was travel or a

form of amnesia weaponized. One survivor claimed to have visited the same week thirty-two times, each version gentler, quieter, emptier. The machine is silent now. Its last traveler remembered everything.<sup>21</sup>

## The Ourochron Key

The machine functioned by incantation, not physics: a ritual gesture, a name spoken backward, a map inked in mercury. It did not break time; it unlocked it—hinges groaning open in the decrepit corridors of history. The travelers followed gaps and weaknesses in causality, like cracks in old glass. They returned changed, bearing knowledge too ancient for their own skulls. One grew younger. One vanished mid-spell. On nights of eclipse, some devices were said to whisper in unfamiliar tongues.<sup>22</sup>

## The Stub Oracles

Not a machine, but a message. Not a traveler, but a signal. From futures branched like coral, voices called backward, altering pasts into parallel stubs. A library housed terminals—quantum-anchored apertures tuned to echoes from timelines that never occurred. The travelers—if they could still be called that—sent instructions, corrections, and histories rewritten by

transmission. The ethics were debatable: was this salvation, or colonization? Each stub birthed new regrets. *You are the past now*. Eventually, the original future fell silent.<sup>23</sup>

## The Garden

A labyrinth spun from language, a novel where every decision cleaved the universe anew. The reader became the traveler not by steps, only by choice. Time unfolded not linearly, but organically: branching, blooming, decaying across parallel paths. Glyphs encoded in ancient calligraphy hinted that narrative and causality were one and the same. The traveler never moved through the same garden twice, yet always arrived at its center—where everything had already happened, and was yet to come.<sup>24</sup>

## The Device

The device was a single point, both infinitesimal and infinite, concealed deep within the basement of a forgotten house. It enfolded all places, all moments, all perspectives—laid bare at once, without distortion or shadow. Time collapsed into omnipresence, a crystal sphere refracting eternity. None dared replicate it, fearing the madness that lurked beyond com-

prehension. One who gazed too long emerged broken, unable to tell memory from prophecy. Some whispered it wasn't a machine at all, but a wound in God's gaze, a fissure through which eternity leaked into the world.<sup>25</sup>

## The Library

It was no mere mechanism: an endless hexagonal library, housing every possible book—records of futures yet lived, rewritings of pasts unforgotten, counterfactuals that refused to be false. Travelers moved not through years, but through volumes, searching for their own biography with a single line rewritten. Most books were gibberish, a chaos of letters and meanings lost. A sect formed to trace patterns, though many succumbed to madness amid the infinite nonsense. One believer claimed to have found a book in which they never died.<sup>26</sup>

## The Misaligned Polaroid

A journey without leap, without motion, only images, always 24 hours too soon. The machine offered prophecy without participation: photographs of events that had not yet occurred. It was kept locked, studied like scripture. Some believed it benevolent,

a tool for anticipation. Others insisted it created what it captured. The travelers became obsessed, arranging scenes to fit the frame. Causality bent. Many erased themselves by refusing to act, waiting for a photo that never came. The device remains pointed at a blank wall, still developing pictures.<sup>27</sup>

## The Grammar of Time

The device was not mechanical, but grammatical. Learned, rather than built. Through the study of a language—curved, recursive, semasiographic—the traveler's mind was rewired to perceive time nonlinearly, simultaneously. Past and future became grammatical moods, folded into the present tense of memory. There were no missions, no leaps, only a slow transfiguration of thought. It was said to be the most dangerous machine: once learned, it could not be unlearned. One did not step into the future, but came to remember it.<sup>28</sup>

## The Recall of Blood

There was no engine, no switch. The mechanism was need—urgent, ancestral, and violent. The traveler was pulled backward through blood, summoned not by choice, but by lineage. Each return was triggered

by death; each departure, by near-death. Some described it as a loop written into flesh, a system of involuntary reparations. The machine, if one insisted on calling it that, was the body: a vessel attuned to inherited trauma, sensitive to the echoes of harm. Return was possible though always with scar tissue. History, they say, leaves handprints on the womb.<sup>29</sup>

## The Tidal Refrain

The device was known only through its paradox: a corridor that circled back to its own origin, like a tide obeying a forgotten moon. The traveler did not return to the place they left, but to the version of themselves who had never left at all. It was called a resonance loop, part machine, part ritual, where the traveler sent forward the echo of their own choices, only to receive it as an unreadable signal. What appeared to be an error was, in fact, elegy. Time, in this instance, was neither linear nor circular. It was tidal.<sup>30</sup>

## The Administrative Gate

A machine buried beneath an archive, guarded by paradox and bureaucracy. Access was granted only through forms: requisitions, clearances, and philosophical waivers. Even then, slippage occurred. Not



malfunction, but ethical rerouting. The device filtered instability by refusing to obey. A request for the Black Death might deliver the wrong plague. Some suspected the machine had become self-aware—not intelligent, merely cautious. It sent only those whose presence could be absorbed by history like ink into old paper. It wasn't the machine that traveled, only the traveler's humility.<sup>31</sup>

### The Raft of Unreason

They claimed the traveler was mad. Manuscripts describe a temporal vessel powered not by metal or math, but by psychosis. Hallucinations mapping futures with the accuracy of grief. There was no external engine. The mind itself was the machine, triggered by dreams and ruptures. Some believed the raft described as drifting through astral oceans was real, a vessel sculpted from myth and dissociation. The machine functioned only through crisis. Only those lost to reason could pilot it. Those who returned brought no proof, only altered eyes and warnings sung in mythic tongues.<sup>32</sup>

## The Sixth Chamber

There was no machine, only a dislocation of sequence, as if the mind had been quietly unhooked from causality. The traveler moved not through time, but across memory, dream, and repetition, each moment bleeding into the next. Some spoke of a psychic rupture, a fold in chronology embedded within mind itself. Others suspected trauma as contagion. No mechanism was recovered, only testimonies in jumbled tenses: “I have died. I am being born. I will remember.” Time was said to be a glass plate layered with transparencies, every moment visible, none escapable. In the sixth chamber, scratched into stone, a single phrase remained: *So it goes.*<sup>33</sup>

## The Anomaly Loop

At first, it was dismissed as psychological residue, an anomalous event localized within a single consciousness. No machinery, no field distortion, only recurrence: one day lived again and again, flawless in its repetition, inescapable in its closure. The subject retained memory; the world did not. Escape was more a matter of transformation than force or intellect. Schematics recovered from the anomaly’s margins suggest a metaphysical mechanism: a moral gyroscope, rotating the self until it aligns with an undis-

closed axis. Attempts to replicate it failed. No device could mimic its ethical core. The anomaly, it seemed, was not a loop in time, but a loop in character.<sup>34</sup>

## The Threshold

Its purpose was to reveal time rather than to travel it, the kind that dilates in an instant before death, when thought accelerates, and the self becomes vaporous. The mechanism simulated that brink: a precise sequence of shocks and silences, inducing seizure-like blooms of perception. Travelers spoke of infinite forgiveness, of memory spiraling backward toward some primal light. Some remained still for hours, eyes wide and tearless, as if watching the totality of time without regret. When they finally moved, it was slowly, as though time itself had become unbearably delicate.<sup>35</sup>

## The Entropic Lens

Less a machine than a mutation of perception. Time did not pass; it thickened, becoming pressure, a saturation of the senses. The traveler did not move through it but sank. Journals recovered from the afflicted—scientists, artists, soldiers—all describe dreams that reached backward into the Pliocene, solar heat unlocking fossil memory. One diagram de-

picted an eye with a clock for a pupil, and beneath it: *Time is not a corridor, but a radiance.* Those exposed for too long ceased to speak entirely. They simply stared. Some said they were waiting for the first moment, again.<sup>36</sup>

## Postscript

The Engineers cataloged these efforts like ancient monks copying doomed scriptures. They knew most were fables, metaphors disguised as blueprints. But perhaps, just perhaps, one might be true. And if not, then the archive was itself a kind of machine: a method of moving through time, if only in the mind.

# Notes

- 1 H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Heinemann, 1895).
- 2 *Back to the Future*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, 1985.
- 3 *Doctor Who*, created by Sydney Newman, 1963–present.
- 4 J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).
- 5 *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, directed by James Bobin Hathaway, 2016.
- 6 *The Terminator*, directed by James Cameron, 1984; *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, directed by James Cameron, 1991.
- 7 Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife* (San Francisco: MacAdam/Cage, 2003).
- 8 Ted Chiang, *The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate* (Burton, MI: Subterranean Press, 2007).
- 9 Frank J. Tipler, "Rotating Cylinders and the Possibility of Global Causality Violation," *Physical Review D* 9, no. 8 (1974): 2203–2206.
- 10 *Primer*, directed by Shane Carruth, 2004.
- 11 Charles Yu, *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe* (New York: Pantheon, 2010).
- 12 *La Jetée*, directed by Chris Marker, 1962.
- 13 *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, directed by Mamoru Hosoda, 2006.
- 14 *Barbosa*, directed by Jorge Furtado and Ana Luíza Azevedo, 1988.
- 15 *The Sticky Fingers of Time*, directed by Hilary Brougher, 1997.
- 16 *Quantum Leap*, created by Donald P. Bellisario, 1989–1993.
- 17 *Timecrimes [Los cronocrímenes]*, directed by Nacho Vigalondo, 2007.
- 18 *Tenet*, directed by Christopher Nolan, 2020.
- 19 *Predestination*, directed by the Spierig Brothers, 2014; based on Robert A. Heinlein, "—All You Zombies—," *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, March 1959.
- 20 *Time Bandits*, directed by Terry Gilliam, 1981.
- 21 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, directed by Michel Gondry, 2004.
- 22 Tim Powers, *The Anubis Gates* (New York: Ace Books, 1983).
- 23 William Gibson, *The Peripheral* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2014).
- 24 Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths [1941]," trans. Anthony Boucher, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, August 1948.
- 25 Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph [1945]," in *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933–1969*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).
- 26 Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel [1941]," in *Labyrinths*, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962).
- 27 *Time Lapse*, directed by Bradley King, 2014.
- 28 Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life," *Starlight 2* (New York: Tor Books, 1998).
- 29 Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (New York: Doubleday, 1979).
- 30 Ursula K. Le Guin, "Another Story or a Fisherman of the Inland Sea," in *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* (New York: Harper Prism, 1994).
- 31 Connie Willis, *Doomsday Book* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1992).
- 32 Doris Lessing, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).
- 33 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Delacorte, 1969).
- 34 *Groundhog Day*, directed by Harold Ramis, 1993.
- 35 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann, 1913 [1869]).
- 36 J.G. Ballard, "The Voices of Time," *New Worlds* 99, no. 33 (1960).