

FREE TIME

(unfinished)

by

Daniel A. Kornguth

Ahem.

Let me see letmesee.

Arthur Conan Doyle – SIR Arthur Conan Doyle, the Scottish doctor and author, wrote four novels and fifty-six short-stories chronicling the adventures of the brilliant London-based detective Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes. Holmes. Holmes.

Sherlock Holmes was famous for his astute observations, powers of retention, and indefatigable logic. He solved problems logically using logic. He relied upon deductive reasoning. He approached problems scientifically. I am a scientist.

Like Sherlock Holmes I notice things and I remember things; I see relationships. Like Sherlock Holmes, I use reason to discern the truth, even when it is obscured from the casual observer. The truth is obscured but I am not a casual observer.

In sixth grade I wrote and presented a book report on “The Hound of the Baskervilles.” Like many of my memories, the events and images are emblazoned on my minds eye as if they occurred yesterday. Here’s the only problem: it seems they did happen yesterday.

I was born on a Thursday. It was April 15th, 1971 at 3:43 in the afternoon. I presented

my book report on Monday, October 18th, 1982 (a date which, incidentally, would've fallen on the same day in the year of my birth).

I'm standing in a kitchen with a porcelain mug of warm coffee in my hand. The calendar tacked to the cabinet suggests that today is Tuesday, October 19th. There are neat red exes on all the days except today. At first I thought they were made with a stamp of some sort but upon closer examination there are subtle imperfections. Nearby I notice a mustard yellow phone with a dial and a spiral cord. Next to the phone is a metal phone index like an oversized cigarette case. Nest to that is a tray with, among other writing implements, a red marker. Beside the marker is a pencil with a tiny plastic, naked, brown skinned person where the eraser might otherwise be. The cartoonish figure sports a shock of florescent hair. My sister had some of these toys – she called them trolls – back in the eighties. According to the calendar, however, it is the eighties; 1982 to be precise.

It's Tuesday, October 19th, 1982, but its not Tuesday, October 19th, 1982, it's Sunday, January 14th, 2007.

It's raining outside and the clock on the wall says 8:32. I hear cars going by but the view from the kitchen is of the back yard and of other houses beyond the fences here in a seemingly affluent suburban neighborhood. There is an old fashioned swing set. It's brightly colored metal tubes making a pair of capital As with a cross piece connecting their peaks. It looks brand new.

There are still green leaves on the trees. The thermostat hanging outside the window reads 78°. If this is fall, it certainly isn't a New England fall; not even the half-hearted fall of '07 witnessed green leaves on the trees by mid-October in Massachusetts. Massachusetts. Mass uhhhh chewwww setsssss. Massachusetts is where I live. Massachusetts is where

I work. I own a house in Massachusetts. I have a wife in Massachusetts. She worked with me in the lab until just before the birth of our daughter. My daughter Anna ... Jane ... Madison ... Valerie ... erm ... my daughter ...

There is a radio or a TV on in a nearby room. I hear mention of the Beltway.

Sherlock Holmes was a keen observer. Sherlock Holmes retained details, even those which seemed insignificant. Sherlock Holmes was a master of deliberation and deductive reasoning. But Sherlock Holmes had a third characteristic which distinguished him as a world class detective. The profound breadth of his knowledge and erudition provided a context within which his other abilities could optimally function. He simply knew so much about so many things.

Here I am, collecting data. I know there is a puzzle. I know there is something wrong. I know all these details are significant but there is a fog, there is a veil, there is something missing. I take stock of the moment, I register current, unfolding events and immediate minutiae, but, grope as I may, I do not know what to compare them to; I don't know how to contextualize them. Perhaps it is because I am very tired. I feel very tired. So tired it's difficult to concentrate.

Wait a second, let me review. I'm in an unfamiliar house, it's the fall of 1983 and, though I was born in 1971, I have over 35 years of memories, some more distinct than others. Oh I don't feel well.

Leaning against the counter between the dining room area and the kitchen proper I sip from my cup. The coffee is delicious. I feel compelled to drink it in spite of how tepid it has become. I hope it will rouse me. I'm having trouble focusing on the moment at the moment. My mind keeps drifting. Maybe I am hungover. There is a can of Folgers next to the coffee maker and after tipping my glass and draining the remainder of its contents I actually

mutter, “Good to the last drop.” A fleeting thought crosses my mind as I hear someone coming down the stairs, “Am I that susceptible to suggestion?”

I notice my heart pounding more rapidly despite the warm lassitude enveloping me, irresistibly, like a heavy, comfy blanket wrapped around me. Yes, my hearts pounding rather fast but I can barely keep my eyes open. It’s not apprehension though; it’s more like, mmmmmmm, more like a narcotic effect.

If I were Sherlock Holmes, my immediate observations of Dr. Michael Amono as he entered the kitchen would lead me to some irreducible, insightful conclusion. There is something about his short cropped hair. His thick hair is predominantly dark but interspersed with errant grays. He wears a London Fog trench coat with the belt tied instead of buckled. His shoes are polished black leather and look expensive. His pressed pin striped pants seem funny, too flared at the bottom, but now I’m squinting in an effort to keep my eyes open.

I am not Sherlock Holmes. I am ... I am ...

“Nate!” His smile reminds me of a late-night talk show host. “Sorry to keep you waiting. Oh good, you finished your coffee. You looked whooped. What did you do last night?”

I shake my head as he pats my arm. I have no answer to his question. My sweater feels too tight and too bulky.

He leads me to the door. I’m breathing heavily through my nose. I notice family photos on the wall, the people look familiar only ... he tugs my sleeve.

The rain must be letting up, I don’t feel it but everything looks wet outside. Walking down the concrete steps to the curb I feel like an automaton and he helps me into the boxy

black car with red pinstripes. It smells like cigarettes but Michael doesn't smoke. Did he ever?

“We've got a long drive ahead of us. You can doze off in the car.”

I nod but my head is lolling before he even gets in and starts the car.

Time is a substance it pools or grows somewhere; there can be a surplus of it. It's either like light: both a particle and a wave, or like gravity or electricity. This scientist finds a way to summon or collect/store it effectively, like in a generator/battery, enabling him to alter either his own time continuum or some global time continuum and effectively time travel.

The team of scientists working on the project includes a psychiatrist who's been with the project from its inception. The head scientist seeks professional help from the psychiatrist who through drugs and hypnotherapy, manipulates the scientist into taking him through time but because of the scientist's addled consciousness and the jumbled time line it takes a long time for him to figure that out the shrink is trying to fix his failed marriage that went sour in the late '80s or vindictively seek pre-emptive retribution for love lost. That is, he tries to fix it but can't and not even in that, “you can't change the flow of time” kind of way, more like in that “people are the people that they are and some outcomes are inevitable.” Maybe it's even the scientist who she has an affair with, but is that too predictable?