

Futures

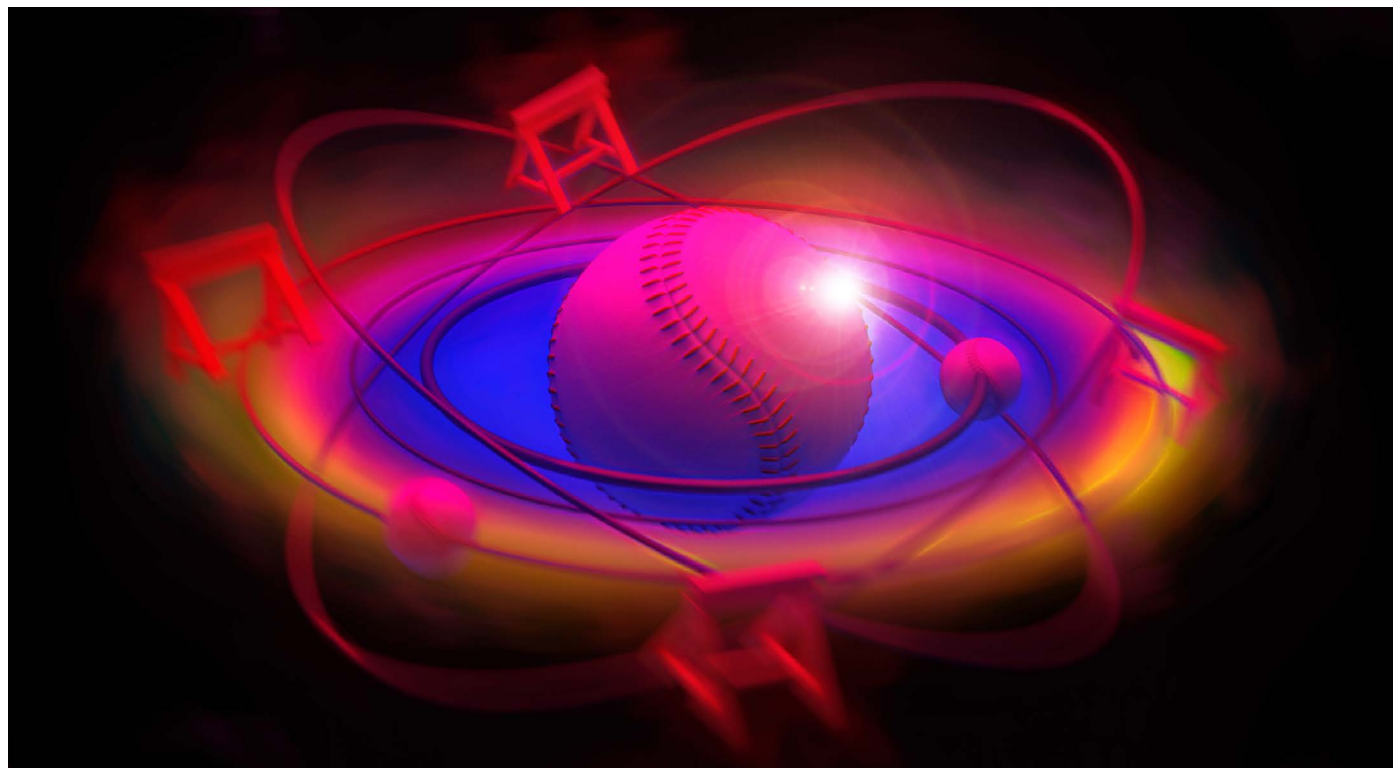


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Border crossing

A lesson in history. By S. R. Algernon

Two wooden sawhorses blocked the road beside a crumbling adobe mission. A car idled on the dirt beside them, sporting chrome, tailfins and a star like a sheriff's badge on the door.

"Don't worry," said Timothy, as he approached in a wood-panelled station wagon. "It's just the local cops. I'll take care of them." He turned to Bill, Jerry and Curtis, who sweltered in the cavernous back seat. "Put the damn phone away, Bill. You won't get a signal."

Glare from the afternoon sun obscured the cabin of the police car, but a hand from the driver's side gestured for Timothy to pull over. Once Timothy complied, a stout officer exited from the driver's side and approached. His partner stood by the passenger door and covered him with a revolver.

Timothy cranked down the window.

"What seems to be the trouble, officer?"

"We've had reports of drifters coming through recently, possible drug use and vandalism. Can I see your licence?"

"Sure."

The officer held the document up to the light.

"Timothy Wright, born January 3rd, 1929. Is that you?"

"Yeah. My buddies and I are on our way to Vegas. We, uh, took a wrong turn a while back."

"You're a long way from Vegas," said the officer. He peered past Timothy. "You folks all right back there?"

"Look, officer, it's just the heat," said Timothy.

"Should have bought one with air conditioning," said Jerry.

"Or GPS," said Bill.

"GPS doesn't work without the satellites, idiot," said Jerry.

"Shut up," said Timothy. "All of you. Look, officer, if you could just point us to a gas station ...?"

"Just a few questions, sir. What's today's date?"

"The date? July 16th, 1969."

"And who is the President of the United States?"

"Richard Nixon, of course."

"Right. And who won the World Series last year?"

"Baseball?" said Timothy. "I haven't, um, kept up with...."

"Let me check," said Bill.

"I told you to put that damn thing away."

"The Tigers," said Curtis. "My grandfather's from Detroit. Never missed a game."

"Right ... And the President of Russia?"

"Vla- uh, I don't, uh ... Khrushchev?"

"Russia doesn't have a President," said Jerry. "Brezhnev was the First Secretary, and the Premier was Alexei Kosygin."

"Shut up, Jerry."

"Your pal seems to know a lot about Russians," said the officer. "Step out of the car and empty your pockets on the hood. Slowly."

"Officer, this is a mistake ..."

The officer tapped his baton against the car's hood. Flecks of dried blood on the end stood out in the sunlight. Timothy emptied his pockets.

"The road you're on passes a restricted

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nuclear testing facility,” said the officer. “If I search this vehicle, will I find any miniature listening devices or cameras?”

“Dammit,” said Timothy. “You’re going to think I’m crazy, but the truth is, we’re from 2019. Something about the nuclear testing opened a rift, and we just drove through it. We just wanted to see things the way they used to be.”

“I see.”

“You don’t know what it’s like in 2019. It’s tough to find a job. Health care costs a fortune. People live all sorts of deviant lifestyles, and everyone pretends it’s normal. There are drugs everywhere, and trouble in the Middle East—”

“Enough,” said the officer. “Are you having what the hippies call a ‘bad trip?’”

“No. Look I can prove it. That quarter on the hood, next to my comb. It’s from 1982. I left it in my pocket by mistake.”

The officer examined the coin.

“I’ve seen enough. You’re under arrest. Walk to the side of the road and kneel, facing that church over there.”

“Under arrest? For what?”

“For driving with a fake licence, possession of counterfeit currency and illegal entry into the United States.”

“Into the United States? We’re from the

United States. We’re Americans, born and bred.”

“So you say.” The officer slammed the baton against the car hood. “All of you, move.”

Once they had done so, the officer paced behind the row of kneeling detainees.

“What’s going to happen to us?” asked Timothy.

“That depends on you, really,” said the officer. “President Nixon set up a facility to handle all you Nineteeners. My guess is, the CIA will take apart your gadgets and pump you full of truth serum until they learn everything they can.”

“For how long?”

“Well, they don’t want the Russians to get word of this time-rip, so they’ll probably keep you under wraps until ... how long does the Soviet Union stick around for?”

“1991.”

“Shut up, Bill.”

“And they might keep you around a while longer to sort out all the trouble in the Middle East.”

“What’s the other option?”

“You tell me who wins the 1969 World Series, and I’ll get in touch with my bookie. Then I forget I found you.”

“The Mets,” said Timothy. “The Miracle Mets.”

“No kidding,” said the officer. “The Cubbies had a real shot this year. And one other thing ... you give me your keys and everything else you got on you, including all those gadgets you’re trying to hide.”

The officer walked to each of the passengers, collecting anything of value. Afterwards, he drove off in Timothy’s car, while his partner followed in the patrol car. Once the dust settled, Timothy stood and helped the others to their feet. They knocked the dirt off their shoes and walked to the mission. A faded inscription above the door read: “De cierto os digo que en cuanto lo hicisteis a uno de estos mis hermanos pequeños, a mí lo hicisteis.”

“At least we’ll be out of the sun,” said Jerry.

“Maybe someone will come by to help us,” said Bill.

“Right,” said Timothy. “Anyone remember how to say ‘water’ in Spanish?”

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