

THE
KARL WERNER
PARADOX

Written by

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Draft VIII

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

It is 1955: Heavy rain is flooding down on KARL WERNER (35), smartly dressed in tweed and hat. He stands next to the open car door of a 1949 Volvo PV 444. The windshield is CRACKED, the hood of the car is DENTED.

On the road, illuminated by the car's headlights, is the battered body of an OLD MAN.

KARL WERNER
Are you alive?

The Old Man does not react in any way. Werner shuffles his feet and looks around, aimlessly. He opens his mouth as if to speak again, but changes his mind.

INT. WERNER'S CAR - NIGHT

Werner shuts the car door as he gets in. His breathing is heavy and intense. The windshield wipers slosh rhythmically back and forth as rain continues to stream down outside.

Werner looks at a clock on the dashboard console. It's arms tell us the time:

9:55

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Werner puts the car in gear. It pulls away slowly, leaving the Old Man in complete darkness.

INT. WERNER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The sun shines through the branches of a tree, casting shadows on the wall by Werner's bed. Werner lies with his arms crossed and stares at the moving shadows. His alarm clock RINGS loudly. Werner barely reacts. He closes his eyes.

INT. WERNER'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Werner pours coffee into a cup and pours a teaspoon of sugar in it. He stirs it gently and taps the spoon on the edge of the cup.

Werner picks up a pen and carries it to a wall calendar. The dates up until SEPTEMBER 9 have been crossed out with X-es. Werner draws a circle around SEPTEMBER 11.

INT. WERNER'S GARAGE - MORNING

Daylight seeps in through cracks between the two-by-fours that have been used to construct Werner's garage. Werner opens one of the two barn doors and lets some light in. He finds a switch and flicks it. A single lightbulb lights up.

The garage doubles as a shed, containing tools, cans of paint and paintbrushes, shovels, etc. Werner steps into the garage and surveys the damages to his car. A bit of blood and hair has seeped into the cracks in the windshield.

He steps to the back of the room and finds an old bicycle leaned against the wall. Werner leads it out, turns off the light and shuts the door.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

A large room, blackboards filled with complicated equations regarding physics, four desks, one obviously used as a storage space, with cardboard boxes full of books, papers and magazines.

Our hero is seated at his own, cluttered desk. His blank gaze is fixed on a notebook full of equations and formulae of physics, to which he holds a pencil completely static.

The door flies open. Enter two colleagues: HAROLD - A grey-haired, spectacled professor; And OSCAR - A short man with an unruly full beard and comb-over. Harold carries a newspaper. In addition, both are carrying folders of documents and notebooks, and are in the midst of a discussion.

HAROLD

...But you know, sub-atomic particles just don't behave that way.

OSCAR

(to Werner)

Hey, you're back. How was the convention?

Werner looks up from his notebook.

WERNER

It was... Okay.

OSCAR

And your presentation?

Harold puts down his folders and raises the newspaper into the air.

HAROLD

I'll tell you how it went.

The newspaper is already folded and ready for Harold to quote from an article.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Let's see... Ah.

(reads)

...But the most entertaining speaker, was quantum mechanics and theoretical physicist Karl Werner, with his lengthy and frankly outrageous presentation on string theory and wormhole technology.

Oscar listens intently as he puts down his things on his desk. Werner rubs his eyelids with his fingers.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

One could almost hear the audience's eyes roll when Werner presented his argument that man should not look to space for the next frontier, but rather consider the possibilities of time travel.

Harold throws the paper onto his desk.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Honestly, Werner. Time travel?

Werner refuses to look at him.

KARL WERNER

It is possible.

HAROLD

You just don't get it, do you?

OSCAR

Okay, calm down.

Oscar shuffles through his documents and finds a sheet of paper full of hand-written formulae.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Why don't we continue where we left off last week?

Werner closes his notebook and stands up.

HAROLD

Where are you going?

Werner grabs his notebook and a few documents off his desk and heads for the door.

OSCAR

Karl?

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The light comes on. A concrete room and all its contents are revealed: Cardboard boxes, an old lawn mower, a carpenter's workbench, a few old radios, boxes of books, etc.

Werner looks over the space before he starts hauling boxes of junk out of the room.

EXT. WERNER'S HOUSE - DAY

Most of the things from the basement are now piled up on Werner's front lawn. Werner comes out of the house with the lawn mower. He throws it into the pile.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The basement is almost empty. Werner has let the workbench, the radios and other electric items remain inside.

MONTAGE:

- Werner starts fitting mechanical components together.
- Werner strips electrical wires and connects them to other wires.
- Werner scribbles down equations in his notebook.
- Werner brings the lawn mower back into the basement.
- Sketches and schematics of a metal machine fill several sheets of paper on the workbench.

INT. BASEMENT - MORNING

Werner has constructed an enormous, brass-plated machine, covering two of the four walls. At one end of the construction is a large cylinder which can be opened and closed. Two metal bars contour around the cylinder, attached to the top and bottom.

The kitchen calendar hangs above the workbench, on which is a few notepads and Werner's alarm clock.

Werner admires his construction. His eyes are searching the room. He looks at his wristwatch and seems to have an idea.

Werner opens the cylinder and puts the watch inside, before he moves to the other end of the construction, starting the lawn mower engine, which functions as some sort of generator. The machine HUMS and VIBRATES.

Werner's excitement is noticeable as the metal bars around the cylinder begins ROTATING.

They speed up, speed up, speed up. Electrical static is HEARD building up within. The bars are now rotating at a ridiculous speed.

Suddenly, the bars detach and fly into the wall, violently ricocheting around the room, knocking out parts on the machine. One of the bars darts against Werner, who just barely escapes it by diving onto the floor.

The machine falls apart while Werner crawls along the floor to the lawn mower and is able to shut it down. While the damaged machine powers down, Werner leans against the wall, catching his breath. He buries his face in his hands.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

In the corner of the lab is a sofa, a few chairs and a coffee table. Oscar is reading a newspaper while Harold is hard at work by his desk. He looks over his notes and scribbles equations on a large blackboard.

OSCAR

You know they still haven't found that driver.

HAROLD

Driver?

OSCAR

This poor old bastard was run over by a car, but the driver took off.

HAROLD

Does it say who the victim is?

OSCAR

Says he's unidentified.

Werner barges in and heads to his desk. Oscar looks at him over the edge of his newspaper.

HAROLD

Where have you been?

Werner rummages through the papers and books on his desk. Harold takes a few steps towards him.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm talking to you.

KARL WERNER

I just need some of my notes.

HAROLD

(shouting)

Your notes?

Werner stops, looks at Harold in surprise.

KARL WERNER

What?

OSCAR

Karl, you haven't been here for two weeks.

HAROLD

What's going on?

KARL WERNER

Nothing.

Werner finds a slip of paper full of scribbled notes. He folds it and puts it in his pocket. He is about to head towards the door...

HAROLD

If you go through that door, don't bother coming back.

Werner stops. He considers this. Oscar stands up.

OSCAR

Don't go.

Werner looks at Oscar. An apologetic smile.

KARL WERNER

Sorry.
(to Harold)
I have to.

Oscar and Harold watch in disbelief as Werner leaves.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Bent over his car, Werner carefully plucks loose the broken windshield with the help of a screwdriver.

A portable radio is tuned in to a news bulletin.

NEWS PRESENTER (V.O.)

...the prime minister Eden was not available for comment.

(pause)

Wiltshire Constabulary have still not been able to identify neither victim nor the driver of a hit and run incident three weeks ago.

The glass falls apart and Werner nicks his hand on it, sustaining several cuts. He retracts his hand and clenches it into a fist, looking at the radio.

NEWS PRESENTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The victim, a man about seventy
years of age, was found near
Wheeler's Wood, Wiltshire with
severe injuries--

Werner turns the radio off.

HAROLD (O.S.)
It was you, wasn't it?

Werner turns and sees Harold in the doorway. He tries to find words to speak, but can't. Harold steps into the garage. He looks around and notices a brand new windshield by the wall.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Are you out of your mind?

Werner looks down at the screwdriver in his hand.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
You have to turn yourself in.

Werner swallows. With a sigh, he drops the screwdriver.

KARL WERNER
Can you help me?

HAROLD
I'll take you to the station.

KARL WERNER
Thank you.

HAROLD
Then I don't want to see you again.

Werner regards his former friend with sadness, and nods.

INT. POLICE STATION RECEPTION - DAY

Werner enters the reception area. His steps are heavy. He stops and waits behind an ELDER COUPLE. They are in discussion with the RECEPTIONIST about something inaudible.

Werner has his eyes fixed on a spot of dirt on the floor while the couple's dialogue fades out O.S.

RECEPTIONIST
Yes?

Werner looks up. The old couple is gone. He looks around for them for a moment, while he takes the few steps required to reach the counter. He is clearly nervous and upset.

KARL WERNER
I'm here about the... the man. Who
was run over.

RECEPTIONIST
Name?

KARL WERNER
Karl Werner.

RECEPTIONIST
And what is it you want to report?

Werner hesitates.

KARL WERNER
Uh... I...

The Receptionist looks up at him.

RECEPTIONIST
Sir?

KARL WERNER
I'd like to... identify him.

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Werner follows behind a CORONER as they walk through the
morgue.

CORONER
I'm glad someone finally turned up.

They approach a cart with a dead body covered by a white
sheet.

CORONER (CONT'D)
Here we are.

The Coroner grabs hold of the top end of the sheet and waits
for Werner.

Werner looks at him and nods, the Coroner pulls the sheet
away from the body's face.

CORONER (CONT'D)
Is this him?

Werner is frozen, staring at his victim's face.

CORONER (CONT'D)
Sir? Is this...

Werner breaks out of his trance.

KARL WERNER

No.

The Coroner looks at him, then at the body, then back at Werner.

CORONER

Are you sure?

KARL WERNER

I'm sorry. I made a mistake.

The coroner pulls the sheet back over the body's face. Werner turns away, thinking.

CORONER

When did you last see him?

KARL WERNER

I... I don't want to talk about it.

CORONER

I know how you feel.

Werner listens.

CORONER (CONT'D)

I didn't speak to my uncle for years. When he died, I kept thinking--

KARL WERNER

If you could only turn back time.

The Coroner smiles.

CORONER

Yeah.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Werner is testing the machine again, but it doesn't work. Some parts fall off and the machine coughs.

KARL WERNER

Argh! Why!

He kicks the machine.

KARL WERNER (CONT'D)

Come on!

MONTAGE:

- Werner scribbles in his notebook.
- Werner makes adjustments to his machine.

- Machine components are replaced with new ones.
- Werner AGES.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DREAM SEQUENCE - NIGHT

FILMED IN REVERSE:

Werner's car rolls backwards into frame and illuminates the dead man. Werner exits the car and stands by the car door.

The rain drips from the ground and floats upwards as Werner walks up to the body and crouches. The old man exhales, a long, sighing breath. He whispers something. Werner leans closer.

OLD MAN
(whisper)
You can't change it.

INT. WERNER'S BEDROOM (1991) - MORNING

Werner awakes with a start. He is about 70 YEARS OLD. He sits up and puts his face in his hands, rubbing his eyes. The alarm clock RINGS, startling Werner. He turns it off.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - MORNING

Werner carefully steps downstairs, carrying his alarm clock.

The machine has gone through many changes, and looks very sophisticated. Plastic and glass fibre has replaced most of the metal, and it takes up a larger portion of the room.

The cylindrical chamber looks almost the same, but there are no metal bars attached. Instead, thick FIBRE-OPTIC CABLES (plastic tubes) are spiraling alongside the inside walls of the cylinder.

The wall is covered by multiple newspaper clippings, formulae, equations, illustrations, and articles on time travel.

Werner puts the alarm clock on the workbench and goes over his notes before he picks up a few tools and makes his adjustments on the machinery.

Once done, he goes to a rabbit cage which contains TWO RABBITS. He opens the cage and picks up one of them. He pets it while carrying it to the workbench. There, he attaches the alarm clock to the bunny with a belt.

Werner writes a few numbers on a piece of paper, rolls it up and attaches it to the the belt. The rabbit is uneasy.

WERNER

There there... No need to be
afraid.

He brings the rabbit to the cylinder, puts it inside and closes it before moving to a control panel on the far side of the machine.

On the panel, he flicks switches, turns knobs, pushes buttons, and the machine awakes. It starts HUMMING, and there is a faint BLUE GLOW shining from it.

The caged, WHITE BUNNY is distressed.

There is a POP from the OLD FUSE BOX, and the room goes dark. The humming fades out as the machine discharges.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - LATER

With the help of a flashlight, Werner replaces the fuse. The light comes back on.

Werner opens the cylinder and finds the brown bunny, lying lifeless on the floor of the chamber. He picks it up and carries it to the workbench, where he compares the alarm clock to the wall clock. They show the same time.

Removing the belt from the dead bunny, he contains his disappointment with a sigh. Another day of defeat.

He takes the rabbit and leaves the basement.

EXT. WERNER'S GARAGE - MORNING

Werner goes around to the back of the garage, where a few two-by-fours are covering a hole in the ground. He lifts the planks to reveal a mass grave of RABBIT CADAVERS. He gently places the brown bunny in the hole.

WERNER

I'll make it up to you.

Werner draws his breath, holds it, and exhales slowly.

WERNER (CONT'D)

I promise. I'll change all of this.

Werner puts the planks back on top of the hole.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Werner sits by his workbench, going over formulae and numbers, deeply concentrated.

There is a SOUND of something scraping. Something is moving somewhere in the basement. The white bunny in the cage is not moving, the sound is coming from somewhere else.

Werner looks around. His eyes land on the cylinder, which is left open. A white bunny, IDENTICAL to the one in the cage, hops out with Werner's alarm clock attached to a belt around its body, and a piece of paper tucked under the belt.

Werner picks it up, not knowing what to think. He eagerly carries it to the workbench, comparing the alarm clock to the IDENTICAL alarm clock on the bench. The clock on the bunny is SEVENTEEN MINUTES SLOW.

WERNER
Seventeen minutes...

He picks the piece of paper from underneath the belt. He looks at the numbers written on it.

WERNER (CONT'D)
Of course.

With dashing speed, he plucks tools from the tool box and gets to work, twisting nuts and bolts on the machinery. Finally, Werner adjusts the control panel on the machine.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER

Werner puts the other white rabbit - wrapped with belt, clock and note - in the cylinder and closes it.

By the fuse box, Werner unscrews all the fuses except the main and basement fuses.

With the help of his flashlight, he makes his way to the control panel, pushes buttons, turns knobs and flicks switches while the machine gently HUMS. The HUMMING grows LOUDER and greatly intensifies while a hue of BLUE LIGHT envelops the machine.

Werner stands in the middle of the room, mesmerised.

The machine quiets down, the SOUND and LIGHT slowly fade, until the room is dark and quiet.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - LATER

Werner puts the fuses back where they belong in the fuse box, making the lights come back on.

He takes a few careful steps towards the cylinder, and opens it.

It is empty.

Werner takes a few steps backwards, covering his mouth with a hand. Tears of joy stream down his face. His hand drops from his face, revealing a blinding smile.

He picks up the remaining bunny, lifts it up and hugs it lovingly while doing a little victory dance.

WERNER

You're a time traveller! A time bunny!

He lifts it up, looking into its eyes.

WERNER (CONT'D)

We did it.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - LATER

Werner frantically goes over his notes and calculations by the workbench. He mumbles words like "ELECTRICAL CHARGE", "ROTATION", "ACCELERATION"... He stops, looks up at the wall clock.

WERNER

More power.

EXT. WERNER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A POWER TRANSFORMER HOUSE is conveniently located just off Werner's property, near the main road. Werner carries a CROWBAR and a bundle of JUMPER CABLES and approaches the transformer.

He breaks open the panel door and hooks the jumper cables to the power outlets inside.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

The jumper cables run from the basement WINDOW down to the end of the machine, where Werner attaches them with care. The lights FLICKER for a moment, before they stabilise.

Werner twists the knobs, flicks the switches and pushes the buttons, before he hurries to the cylinder. The machine gives its familiar HUM, and Werner pauses for a brief moment, looking over his time machine.

He exhales sharply and enters the cylinder, closing it from the inside.

INT. TIME MACHINE

Werner is inside the cylinder. The fibre-optics along the walls gleam in BLUE LIGHT which grows brighter by the second.

The humming is intense, building up in accordance to the light.

The light finally gets so bright that it burns out everything else. In the end, we see nothing but white.

The SOUND "breaks" into distorted frequencies.

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

The machine shines with an intense BLUE LIGHT. Then, with a FLASH OF WHITE...

INT. WERNER'S BASEMENT (1955) - DAY

...The machine is GONE, and the basement is cluttered as it was the first time we saw it.

Werner falls onto the floor, hurting his knee, where the cylinder was standing.

Exhausted, Werner stands up slowly. He limps towards the stairs.

INT. WERNER'S KITCHEN - DAY

Werner limps in and takes a seat by the kitchen table. He pulls his trouser leg up to reveal a BLUE KNEE.

Leaning back for a breather, he looks around the room and notices the calendar on the wall. The last day crossed out, is 9 SEPTEMBER. He laughs in relief. He looks at his watch.

KARL WERNER

Eight hours.

INT. WERNER'S GARAGE - DAY

The garage door opens and Werner peeks in. The garage is like it was when we first saw it, but there is no car. Werner shuts the door and leaves.

INT. FOREST ROAD - AFTERNOON

A BUS drives away, leaving Werner at the side of the road. Trees line both sides of the road. No houses, no people, no traffic.

Werner looks in the direction the bus came from, and starts walking that way.

He holds out his hand. A DROP OF WATER hits it. It starts RAINING.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Werner has sped up, and limps with haste along the road. It is very dark, and the rain is pouring down.

WERNER

Hello!

Werner stops, exhausted. He looks at his wristwatch:

9:49

With all the air in his body, he shouts as loud as he can.

WERNER (CONT'D)

WHERE ARE YOU?

He bends over, hands on his thighs, huffing and puffing.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Where are you...

Behind Werner, around a sharp bend, a LIGHT intensifies. A car is approaching.

Werner notices the light, and panics.

The car comes around the bend.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Stop!

He runs into the road to stop the car. He waves his arms as he is silhouetted by the headlights approaching him. The driver hits his brakes, but too late. The tires screech and we HEAR Werner's body take the blow against the vehicle and land on the ground as the car stops.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - WERNER'S CAR - NIGHT

The old man lies twisted in the light from the car. His face is beaten and covered in blood. The car door opens, someone steps out and remains at the car door.

The driver, wearing a hat and tweed, is Karl Werner, 35 years old.

FADE OUT.