

# Science Fiction

## When the Clock Moves Backwards

By: Drew D. Lenhart



### Drew D. Lenhart

Drew is a technology nut from Indiana who works in Information Technology writing software. When he's not writing code, he's writing words. He has written numerous flash fiction, short stories, and comic books. He founded the comic publishing company, SnowyWorks. More info can be found at <https://snowyworks.com>.

The desolate streets of the ancient world were obscured by thick, tainted-yellow smoke. Even behind the protective breathing apparatus with filtered air tanks, the stench lingered, a constant reminder of the toxic smog. Only Lexi was around to guide me. “In twenty feet, turn right,” advised Lexi. Lexi was a cutting-edge marvel of technology, a motion sensitive, A.I. driven GPS assistant, all contained in a small earpiece.

I couldn't see much beyond the swirling clouds, just hazy shadows moving behind the protective plastic of my mask.

“Make sure you're right about this,” I muttered. “The smog is so thick today; I can barely find my way in this mess.”

“My sensors track registered locations only, sir,” Lexi replied. I couldn't fathom how people endured this smog-infested landscape. Just looking at the air made me feel sick. I prefer to

stick to the high-rise buildings, cleaner air, better views.

“In five feet, turn left.” Lexi directed, projecting red markers onto my goggles. Yet, the system often struggled, revealing obstacles just before I collided with them.

Occasionally, dim lights of moving vehicles zipped by my left leaving streaks of light in the smog and seemed to slowly dissipate. Short blasts of thick, smoggy air would hit my ruffled brown overcoat causing me to misstep, almost as if it were a wave of water crashing into me.

“In forty-two paces, you will have arrived at your destination,” Lexi declared, outlining a small shop in red.

Looking through the mask of the breathing apparatus, before me in bended neon tubes, I squinted to barely make out the glow of *Calzer's Clockworks* sign hanging in the front window. The store seemed frozen in time, likely a remnant from the 21st century.

“You have reached your destination,” Lexi announced, marking the shop's door.

I twisted the handle opening to a small foyer. The door creaked

open, revealing tile and  
woodwork, real woodwork, a  
stark contrast to the modern  
world of recycled plastic.  
A sign hung on the wall with  
instructions for visitors. *Please  
wait until decontamination is fully  
complete before entering!*  
A solid blast of cold air hit me  
from all sides, startling me. This is  
decontaminant doing its job,  
destroying any living microbe that  
may have latched onto me. I  
couldn't shake the fear of it  
missing something, poisoning me  
slowly.  
Calzer's Clockworks is a sanctuary  
of time. In every conceivable  
place is a clock of some sort. If  
there ever was a place for old  
clocks to end up, this is the place.  
The left wall upon entering was  
lined with tall and beautifully  
constructed grandfather clocks  
crafted out of wood, which all  
seemed to be ticking in sequence.  
Clocks of all shapes and sizes  
hung on every wall: circular,  
square, oval, and triangle. Clocks  
with visible moving gears, cuckoo  
clocks and their busy components  
were like a symphonic orchestra  
playing in tune. Inside illuminated  
display cases sat hundreds of  
wrist watches and pocket watches  
decked in gold and silver.  
Behind the counter sat an old  
man with thick, black-rimmed  
glasses, which magnified the size  
of his eyes. He was a round,  
pudgy man with a black sweater  
vest looking intently into a large  
magnifying glass repairing a small  
pocket watch. He took no notice  
of me. I took off the breathing  
apparatus and stood in front of  
him tapping my foot a few times  
to catch his attention.  
"Excuse me?" I said, annoyed.  
"Can you help me?"  
Suddenly interested. "Hello sir,  
my name is Calzer, what can I  
help you with today?" he said,  
with his eyes looking above his  
thick glasses.  
"I'm looking for a clock for my  
wife, can you help me find one?"  
I asked.  
He nodded silently while putting  
down a small screwdriver and  
moved aside the pocket watch  
carefully.  
"Can you be more specific?"  
asked Calzer as he propped his  
head up with his hand. "There are  
all kinds of clocks. Wall clocks,  
pedestal clocks, digital clocks,  
alarm clocks, and atomic clocks,  
just to name a few."  
"How about a clock to sit above  
our fireplace?" I suggested.  
Calzer stood slowly. "Ah, yes. I do  
have the perfect clock you can  
take off my hands."  
Calzer pulled a skeleton key out of  
his vest pocket and unlocked the  
door of a large wooden chest.  
Inside, Calzer removed a clock  
about a foot long with a light  
wooden stain. The clock face was  
a light aging yellow.  
"This clock is very old. I cannot  
seem to get rid of it. It is very  
beautiful and well maintained,"  
said Calzer as he admired the  
intricate wood carved detail on  
the clock.  
Judging by the age, this would be  
the perfect gift for Therese. The  
clock was thoroughly cared for as  
the wood looked brand new. The  
craftsmanship of the intricate leaf  
border around the edges  
magnified its beauty.  
"It does look very nice. I think my  
wife would truly enjoy this."  
"Perfect! However,..." his voice  
trailed off. He hesitated before  
continuing, "This clock..." Calzer  
said as he put a hand on the clock  
and the other on his hip. "Holds  
power beyond your  
comprehension."  
"Power?" I scoffed. "You're  
speaking nonsense. It is nothing  
more than a relic of times gone  
past."  
"You're blind to the truth!"  
Calzer's voice grew sharp.  
"I don't understand," I said. "It's  
just a clock".  
"Well, yes, it is, however this  
clock is truly important and  
special. As the new owner of this  
clock, you must agree to maintain  
and protect this clock at all costs.  
And never, ever turn the clock  
hands backwards or  
counterclockwise."  
Calzer paused and looked down  
as if he were embarrassed. "Time  
always moves forwards, not  
backwards. Remember that.  
Moving the hands backwards will  
cause you to go back in time."  
"I really thought this was some

cheap tactic to jack the price, but you are actually insane,” I said. After a short pause, I burst out laughing. I put my hand on the display case to hold myself up. I glanced over at Calzer, who was unamused. This was no joke to him. I could see the crinkles on his forehead as if he were holding back the anger.

“Ok, I’m sorry, this is not a joke?” I said, trying to hold back the laughter.

“I am telling you the truth, the mere act of turning the dials back could catapult the bearer to a place beyond their wildest imagination.”

It must have been the child in me, always having to push that button, or touch wet paint when a sign clearly says *Wet Paint*. I don’t know why. I put my index finger on the hour hand and moved it counterclockwise around the dial several times. Calzer yelled. “You are... making... a grave mistake!”

Calzer’s voice and the noise of the entire store began to slowly get quieter as if someone turned the volume down on a remote. I began to squint a little more as everything began to look fuzzy and lose its color. I looked down at my hands. The color was fading, and I could slightly see through them.

Nausea set in and I closed my eyes. My skin began to tingle as if my whole body were asleep. Absolutely no sound at all. What was happening? Suddenly, sound began to slowly fade in. I could make out the chirping of birds and crickets. No clocks ticking. No sounds of the big city, nothing but the sounds of nature. A gentle breeze blew at my back. The air smelled clean and fresh, no pollution.

“Unable to contact servers, trying again in five minutes,” said Lexi. I stood there, taking in the lush, untouched wilderness, feeling an unexpected sense of belonging. This ancient world seemed to beckon me, inviting me to shed the chaos of my life and embrace its beauty.

The wonder quickly dissipated with the sense of terror. Just as I started to imagine spending the rest of my days here, a ground-shaking sound began to approach, heaving, trampling with hollow thumps, growing louder with each passing second. Something big was moving in the woods as I heard loud puffs of breath. Off to my left, a massive beast of ancient myth, towering over me like a mountain, crashed through the thick brush. Its scales gleamed with an ancient, weathered majesty and its eyes locked onto mine.

My heart raced; I couldn’t move. Every instinct screamed at me to run, but I froze in awe and terror. The ground trembled beneath its massive weight, sending shockwaves through my feet as it let out a thunderous growl. Time seemed to stand still.

Suddenly its long neck ducked to match my height and before I could scream for help, its mouth engulfed my head. I began to see black as its teeth sank into my throat.

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