

Time Tunnel

by James Lynn Smith

“Not much longer,” Paul said under his breath. He had waited for months. The fabric of space was about to crack and he would meet her. She would step through the time warp and be his mistress, his soul mate.

Two factors accounted for this. First his psychic ability and second a rare natural occurrence. Collisions of black holes in the distant stellar reaches flung waves of space-time displacement outward. Some wave structures would condense into vortices. He was at such a place now. It was a convergence point through which a being from the past could transmit to the future. His singular understanding of this made him different and proud of it.

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During the last year, he felt deep sensations from an entity feminine yet assertive, intelligent but spirit-led, and humble yet determined. His imagination unified these sensations into the image of an attractive and confident young woman, one with stronger love potential than women in his own time.

Paul learned to synchronize psychic receptions from the woman with vortex timing. Detecting distress, he sensed what time in the past it came from. After researching world history, he understood. Oppression, executions, and war were rampant. She was facing some life and death situation. It was just a matter of time; he and the vortex were waiting.

He was certain that passing through the time vortex required linking of intense desires. And there was no stronger desire than to escape in the moments before execution. Linking of desire required a mind-melding with her. He felt

prepared and imagined the gratitude she would feel afterwards.

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He stared outward at the ocean from the veranda of the old house he had rented. *Almost time*. An electric charge permeated the air. Near the horizon, the sky darkened. Clouds rolled and boiled, coming closer. Distant lightening flickered and the low rumbling thunder followed. Clouds circled and swirled, slowly forming a deep sky tunnel that magnetized his attention. He felt a strange tug about his head and shoulders. Memories appeared before him while being drawn out and queued for transmission. How he dressed, how he shaved, his parents: all sent into the vortex. He had reception also: sensations of wearing different clothing, posed in a combat stance with a steel blade. Smells of an animal, a horse, were followed by faint word sounds: “*Ce qui se passe? Qui est cela?*”

Now he knew. *It's beginning: language, connection, the melding of minds*. Vocal expressions, both sane and absurd, raced from him. Paul's scatterbrained, sassy-mouthed cousin Patty popped into his mind. *No, not her in this*. He tried to block her engram but felt an empty tug instead. Too late. That vernacular streamed out also. Next he felt dizzy and a headlong rushing.

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He roused from where he had fallen on the veranda, staggered to his feet and saw the swirl of clouds gently receding. *It's over...Did it work?* Turning about, he saw a figure lying on the veranda. Joyful surprise burst from his lips. “She's here. It worked.”

The girl moaned and moved slightly.

He saw her tattered clothes, cropped honey-colored hair, and petite hourglass shape. *She's diminutive and lovely*. “Who are you my dear? What is your name?”

The girl opened her eyes with startled yelp. “I am Joan of Arc. And *who* the

hell are you?

“Joan of wha...?” Stunned by identity and vernacular, he tried to answer.

“My name is Paul. We are on an island near—”

“I *expected* an angel. I *get* a weirdo dressed for a freak show. You get those threads off a dead pack-rat or what?”

Paul frowned. *Sounds like cousin Patty*. “But this is proper dress for our time. You have been projected hundreds of years into your future.”

“You gotta be—What have you been smoking? And why am I talking this way? You too. It sounds like Anglo doggerel.”

“In the vortex, there was an exchange of language, syntax and idioms. It mostly went one way, unfortunately, and the influence of my cousin and her way of speech has...Oh never mind.”

“So I speak your lingo but for mine you’re dumb as a cow patty.”

“You have French or English ‘lingo’ to express yourself. For me, I guess not. But as a psychic, I’ve connected with your soul for a long time. I didn’t know exactly who you were, so we have a lot to learn about each other.”

“The last guy to use a line like that on me is missing his ear. I am married to God, and my mission is to lead His army against iniquity. I liberated Orleans and helped drive the English from our lands.

“How can you be so *flippant*? You must have been under a great strain. I communed with high emotional distress before the vortex formed.”

“Huh? Wait. That was *you*? I felt some creepy-crawly thing inside my head. Thought it was God’s test of my will... Oh no no no. Do you know what you did? You and your vortex thingy made me disappear just before they turned me into soot rubble. Now they will think I really *was* a witch. I won’t be a martyr. No saint. History is changed.”

“ But that’s not for the worse.”

“Yes it is. I’ve got to go back. Or else I’ll have to raise God’s army right here. It was miserable back there, but failing my orders from On High is worse.”

“I don’t know that you *can* go back. If so, it might be risky. Why don’t you let me help you relax? I could soothe those rope burns, they must be sore.”

“Touch me bro, and I’ll lay you low. I’m God’s knight and only He will heal me. I have things to do.”

Hurt and confused, Paul turned away and looked skyward. “I just wanted a lover. But this is a thorny case. She has the body of a nymph, the soul of a saint, and *speaks* like a potty-mouth. With her godly war hang-ups, she probably takes knife and sword to bed with her.” *I’d be like making love to a porcupine.*

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For the next few days, Joan and Paul developed an uneasy truce, and then the boat came to the island. Joan accompanied Paul back to his homeland and moved into a room in his spacious apartment. His work as editor at an internet magazine allowed him flexibility. He brought Joan information in the form of newspapers and magazines. They went out on the street so he could point things out to her. She learned quickly.

After a while, she began to assert her tastes. She hated his modern clothes and took some out of his closet. She replaced them with other things from a consignment shop and insisted he put them on. Finally, he donned a too-small purple shirt with huge, white blousy pants. Paul looked in the mirror, frowning.

“If I just had green hair, I would look like a *turnip*—I can’t wear this.”

“Look pouty puss, a turnip is better than that clown suit you put on every day. What’s *with* you people in the duds you wear anyhow?”

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Despite their differences, Paul continued to acquaint Joan with modern life. He also showed how to get news on the Internet and TV. She absorbed information

more quickly than anyone he had ever known. *What does it all mean to her?* He hoped she would calm down and appreciate her denied soul connection with him.

One day Joan looked at him solemnly. “I’ve come to a conclusion. From the outside, this world of yours is like a suit of shining armor, but inside it smells like a sty. It’s full of godless people. There should be an army of righteousness marching out to squash sin and corruption. Prophets on the street carry little ‘God bless’ signs but have no home and are treated like scum. People who need exorcism are locked up and called ‘disturbed’ because they don’t have money for cures. Thugs attack young women and the court harasses the *victims*, like they *wanted* to be jumped. I’ve got to get out for a while.

“Maybe you should consider some things before you—Where are you going? Come back.”

“I’m outta here. Things to do, Bubba.”

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Paul expected her to return. But days went by and he became distraught. How did she subsist? Then he discovered his bank card was missing. Upon checking, he found that she made a sizeable withdrawal. At first he thought about calling the police with a missing person report, but then reconsidered. He mouthed the expected response:

“Yes sir. What is the subject’s name and social security number?... Joan of Arc? No social? You *are* missing something sir, but we don’t repair lobotomies here.”

“*What’s wrong with her? Why doesn’t she call me?* Paul needed to talk, but he was alone. He looked at his image in the mirror. “Maybe she will call. She’s bound to run into a snag at some point.” He turned and forced himself to sit. “I need to watch some TV and calm down. Can’t just sit alone here doing nothing.”

“... And so the president will meet with the prime minister Tuesday—This

just in. Police confirm that several homeless people have disappeared from the streets and inmates from Saint Simon's mental hospital have escaped. Because of similar timing police believe the events are related."

That's strange. Wonder what's going on? Paul tried to become interested in watching the follow-on programming, but from nervous exhaustion dozed off instead.

The TV sound rose in volume. "We interrupt current programming to bring you this news. Police report that several horses have been taken from Canyon Park riding stables. It occurred under the cover of darkness. An investigation is underway."

Paul abruptly sat upright. *The smell of horses. The vortex.* "No. It's crazy. I see Joan riding off with a band of human derelicts to conquer iniquity." Paul grabbed the remote control and punched a change in the channel.

"We interrupt programming to bring you this brief news item. The Bains Historical Museum reports a theft of medieval battle armor and swords last night. The collection contains well over a hundred artifacts. Police are investigating whether the recent episodes of theft and missing persons are related. Now we return you to regular programming."

Paul stood. "Crazy girl. Call me, Joan. You need to listen to me." Then he began to scurry around, looking at magazines and newspapers she had been reading. As feared, he found there were pencil marks where articles about Saint Simon's and the Museum appeared. He searched for other articles that she may have marked for hints of where she was. Too distraught to enable his psychic faculty, he felt helpless and cold panic nudged his mind. He punched the remote to a different local channel, seeking more information.

"We interrupt 'Saturday Night Live' to bring you breaking news. Police have a Special Operations Unit at the corner of Halford and Vine. A large group of

rioters, some on horseback, were threatening tourists in the theater district. The group has now formed ranks for a faceoff with the police. They are wielding antiquated armor and swords in a threatening manner.

“Joan, what are you doing?” Paul stared at the TV. “That won’t work here. Call me. Get out of there.”

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Finally Paul settled down enough to get a fitful night’s sleep. He managed to get up the next morning and do a little work at his downtown office. Returning home late that afternoon, he ate left-over dinner. Afterwards, he nervously picked up the TV remote to get local news. He stopped, hearing a knock at the door and then a key in the lock. He turned toward the sound as the door opened. “Joan, how did you get here? What happened? You look worn out.”

“I disbanded the army. I’ve got to go back through that time tunnel thing.” Her voice quavered. “I can’t take it anymore.”

“What are you saying? Are you crying?”

“Nothing makes sense here. I can’t tell the godly from the sinners. Everybody has both all tangled up inside. That theater place shows big pictures and billboards of painted hussies for innocent kids to see. Dirt bags in your government lie and steal you blind, but it’s your knobheaded citizens that vote them in. Who is guilty? Who should be whacked? And my army will not obey God. They are spineless cowards. I did see the enemy though. They’re evil troops that all wear black and yell into that megavoice thing.”

“That was the Special Operations Unit with a megaphone. They’re police.”

“Whatever. This guy I picked out to be my lieutenant, he told me he knew the streets like the back of his hand and could lead my knights. When we saw the black troops, I gave him the best sword and told him to mount and charge.”

“What did he do?”

“He just stood there and wet his pants.”

*

The next day, they were calm. Joan mostly sat, saying very little. Paul respected her space, fearing another manic episode. Yet he gently probed.

“How do you feel, Joan? What are you thinking?”

“How do I *feel*?” She started to lunge at him, but stopped herself, lowered her head and shook it. “I’m sorry, Paul. It’s just that this was all a big blooper. You’ve got to get me back to that time tunnel thing before it’s gone. I’ve figured out how it works with feeling and mind. That and my faith can get me back.”

“But the execution. You don’t want that. History shows they burned you twice and dumped your ashes into the river.”

“The execution is over by now. I won’t hurt. I’ll just not have the body.”

“But where could you *be* when you go back?”

“Where all saints go. I am not the body. When God wants me to have another, I will.”

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Paul took her back to the island, marveling at how she had come to synchronize with the vortex potential. The clouds darkened and closed in, beginning the swirl about the sky tunnel. Paul felt sad, but saw that Joan had fervor about her. He felt the electric charge in the air as the vortex formed.

“We should learn from this,” she said. “I was wrong to escape destiny toward anything but the arms of God. You should pay more attention to the world you live in. This is where you learn your soul’s lessons.” She paused. “Actually, you’re all right, Paul. In a way your mind is like a candle in the darkness. Except for some *attitudes* that make you hop around with your candle flame up your own tush. Give everybody a break and get over yourself. Mix in with people you think are too ordinary, because frankly you’re the one who’s a pill. Don’t strain your

weird little psyche, when real life is shouting ‘I love you. Come out and play.’”

“I’ll miss you,” he said.

“Love a girl in your *own* world and don’t put expectations on somebody that can’t *possibly* dig you—No offense intended.” A mischievous smile came to her face. “I will have to give you this, though. When you were dressed up like a turnip, you were kind of cute.”

Joan turned back toward the vortex and stepped toward it. Then she vanished and assumed her rightful place in sainthood.

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