

TIME REVOLUTION

Book 3 of the Marc McKnight Time Travel Adventures
(Sample Chapters)

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GAINESVILLE, GA

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Dedication

“Time Revolution” is dedicated to my amazing wife Martha, who is always in my corner and keeps me on my toes. Life with her is a great adventure every day and I can’t wait to see what’s next.

Don’t worry about your heart, it will last you as long as you live.

—W. C. FIELDS

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CHAPTER 1

Thursday, November 16, 1786 — 11:55 am — The Great Smoky Mountains, Northern Virginia

Hiding under the leaves in a forest was not Major Marc McKnight's idea of fun. But doing it during a mission in the Appalachian Mountains of Northern Virginia in 1786 was worse.

He followed normal protocols after time-jumping the 250 years back to this date. After landing, he stood and did a three-sixty assessment of this unfamiliar environment.

The mission plan called for him to land at the intersection of two Indian trails.

One was a wide, much-traveled trail that ascended the mountain from Harper's Ferry to a Cherokee Indian village. The narrower crossing trail came from the mountain summit. It was much steeper and leaped across the wider trail on its way downhill to the Potomac River.

He'd been in this part of Virginia before, hiking with friends.

Just barely in Virginia, he corrected himself as mission planner Kathy Wu pointed out.

His position was just south of Harper's Ferry where, one day, the future states of Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland would meet.

Most of the season's brilliant leaf colors now lay on the forest floor. The few leaves still on the trees rattled in a light breeze. The earthy smell of Virginia mountain forest filled his nostrils.

He could hear sounds in the distance — voices, laughter, and cooking utensils — from the Indian village up the hill.

Made it. I'm in the right place. Now to head back toward Mount Vernon to scope out the travel routes from there to the Cumberland area.

Before he took ten steps, he heard sounds coming up the trail. The mission plan called for avoidance of interaction with locals, so he left the trail and hid underneath the leaves five yards off the trail. Concealment wasn't his forte, but every Army Ranger has exposure to stealth techniques.

With a little luck, they'll pass by quickly and I can move on.

From his hiding place, McKnight could see the trail sections in front of him. Two Indian families made the sounds he heard, traveling together and making their way up to the Cherokee village. The Indians themselves made surprisingly little sound. Their horses' hooves and their sleds made the noise as they scraped across the rocky ground of the trail.

He decided to wait fifteen minutes after the Indians passed before moving. Another small band walked by ten minutes later. He reset his internal timer. Five minutes later, three braves with long rifles and game bags passed his position.

McKnight chuckled to himself.

This trail is the 1786 version of Interstate 81.

If the foot traffic subsided for a few minutes, he would continue the mission, but with a modified plan. Traveling on this trail wasn't an option. The volume of traffic was too high to avoid significant contact with locals. He didn't speak Cherokee and didn't sound like a colonist or a frontiersman.

McKnight asked himself again why he, the team leader, had given himself this mission. Of course, he knew the answer. He was the best choice for several reasons.

At six feet in stature, he was tall for this era in history. But his dark brown hair and brown eyes came from a full-blooded Cayuse great grandmother on his mother's side.

None of the rest of his team were a fit for this mission. Captain Tyler was on his honeymoon. Lieutenant Wheeler was Hispanic with a Detroit accent. And Lieutenant Hatcher was... gone.

This time-jump was reconnaissance for a future mission. Later this year, retired General George Washington would travel through these woods on the way to the Cumberland region, looking for a viable commerce route.

But now, the recon mission was in jeopardy.

McKnight didn't need his watch to know he had been under the leaves for four hours. The sun had climbed from just over the horizon to directly overhead in the November sky. His legs itched like crazy. There was no telling what kinds of ants or other insects were crawling on him, not to mention other potential vermin. At least he was warm, but otherwise he was uncomfortable.

While lying here in the leaves, he saw his share of animals. A dozen deer, two black bears.

There was a lull of fifteen minutes in the trail traffic. He needed to move. His body was stiff from remaining motionless for so long. His joints and muscles screamed to stretch and be moving.

He hated to do it, but he was ready to call this mission a wash and a failure. For the next try, he'd get Kathy to find another place where it wasn't so damned crowded.

The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He thought he heard something up the hill behind him. It was almost imperceptible, but he felt another presence.

With the excruciating slowness required to sustain his hiding place, he turned his head to the left. There, ten feet away, was a snake. He's seen several today, but this one was much closer and appeared to be staring right at him. He guessed it smelled him and was trying to decide what manner of prey was hiding in the leaves.

It was a large reptile. Or at least its proximity made it seem that way. Its head was rust-colored, and the body was rust and pale pink. The head was V-shaped. Kathy briefed him on the indigenous poisonous snakes, and this one was most likely a copperhead.

Go away!

He knew the snake couldn't read his mind, but he couldn't help thinking the command.

The snake moved ever so slightly. It gathered its coils beneath it and raised its head, apparently to get a better look.

Oh, shit. Go away!

The snake moved closer, almost imperceptibly. But the move wasn't lost on McKnight.

He had weapons. His pistol was next to his hand, but he didn't want to use it. Without the dampening effect of leaves on the trees, every human within a mile would hear the report and he didn't need that kind of attention.

His knife was at his hip and was the preferred weapon, but he didn't want the snake to be close enough for him to use it.

But the snake didn't agree. It moved closer. It was only five feet away now. It wasn't close enough to strike yet, but it was definitely interested and edged closer to him.

It happened so fast, McKnight flinched. A long knife severed the snake's head from its body. McKnight saw two legs clothed in buckskin land next to him in the same instant.

The danger from the snake was over, but McKnight's instinctive move ensured that his presence was no longer a secret.

He rolled away from the legs and came to his feet.

Before him was a young brave. McKnight knew most people in this era were shorter than present-day humans, but this Indian was an exception.

He was taller than McKnight. He was warmly dressed, but McKnight was sure the man was built like Superman's kid underneath his buckskin and fur. A long rifle and a game bag lay on the ground behind him.

The brave looked McKnight up and down, then shrugged off the robe that covered his shoulders.

That's not good.

McKnight was a stranger here and engaged in stealth. He'd be perceived as an enemy. What else could the young brave believe?

McKnight raced through his options. The large man before him would not know martial art techniques. That was an advantage. But Indian fighting was unconventional and influenced by personal style. Or at least it was in Oregon where he grew up. That was a disadvantage.

They faced off for only a second before the young brave charged. He still had the bloody long knife in his right hand and tried to deliver a slashing stroke as he approached. McKnight stepped toward him, caught his knife hand with both hands, spun and dragged his attacker over his right hip. He stripped the knife from the Indian's hand in the process. His attacker went airborne and landed on his back in the middle of the trail.

McKnight jumped down the slope onto the trail. The Indian had regained his feet and now looked embarrassed and angry.

He smiled at McKnight and let out an articulated whoop.

Calling for help.

He guessed the brave was younger than he looked and inexperienced at fighting.

But not inexperienced enough to be stupid.

From the uphill vicinity of the Indian village, McKnight heard answering whoops. The alarm was raised.

The young brave whooped again and smiled broadly at McKnight.

Help is coming.

He guessed the help was less than 300 yards away. If he wasn't gone in thirty seconds, he'd be captured.

When I press the recall button, it'll take fifteen seconds to fire.

McKnight needed to get away from the brave to initiate travel. He couldn't risk allowing the young man to be hurt or killed by contact with the time bubble.

Not to mention that the Indian was merely protecting his village from a perceived enemy.

This time, as the young brave attacked, McKnight sidestepped and pushed him off the trail and down the hill. His momentum carried the young man ten yards down the slope below the trail. McKnight guessed the young brave would be unable to negotiate the slippery leaves and steep slope before he could time-jump.

He pulled out his travel beacon and clicked it. The welcome bubble of brilliant white swirling air surrounded him.

He looked up the trail toward the village and saw four Indians sprinting down the rocky path toward him. He took a deep breath and expelled it with relief.

I'll be gone before they can get here.

McKnight turned back to check on the young brave, but not quick enough to avoid being knocked to the ground. The kid was faster than he expected and oblivious to the pulsating time bubble.

They rolled on the ground together with the bubble now encasing them both. After a moment, the Indian leaped up and backed up a step.

He's confused by the time bubble.

McKnight did a quick mental calculation.

He's too close. If the time bubble fires now, he's dead.

McKnight took three steps backward to move the bubble away from the young brave.

The Indian hesitated for a second, then leapt forward to attack. He hit McKnight like a linebacker in a pass rush. McKnight had no choice if the brave was to survive.

He grabbed the young man in a bear hug. The Indian tried to bite him, but McKnight head-butted him in the face, breaking his nose. Stunned, the Indian slumped. Blood gushed over his lips and chin.

McKnight glanced at the approaching Indians in time to see one of them stop and raise his long rifle. The others continued running toward him, but slanted to the side to give the other a clear shot. But then the time bubble bulged and dissipated.

McKnight and the young brave fell backward through a field of stars.

Sunday, November 16, 2036 — 12:02 pm — HERO Team Lab, Alexandria, Virginia

Trevor George and Doctor Kathy Wu waited in the HERO Team Lab for McKnight to return from 1786. As always, team members took shifts on watch in the Lab while a time travel mission was in progress.

Congress created the Historical Event Research Organization within the U.S. Army, but it required at least one planner to be a civilian. General Drake selected Kathy Wu when the team was first formed because of her eidetic memory, her expertise in history and politics, and her uncanny ability to read people.

Kathy and Army Captain Winston Tyler were the two mission planners for the team.

Kathy stood about 5'4" and her inky hair was nearly always pulled back in a ponytail. She was born in Washington DC in the Chinatown district. In college, she majored in Psychology and minored in Business Computing. Her doctorate was in Politics. She loved to quote lines from old movies whenever she had the chance.

Trevor George was the newest member of the HERO Team. Before he joined, he was a cold case investigator for the Atlanta Police Department. He assisted with the HERO Team's first mission and General Drake invited him to join after he showed superior analytical skills in his support role.

Trevor was curious about everything. Any mystery or puzzle interested him, whether it was scientific, relational, or a clue to a case. Other than that, he was average — 5'9", 175 pounds with curly reddish-brown hair and brown eyes.

Some people believed Trevor accepted the job because of the excitement and challenge associated with time travel. Others believed it was his attraction to Kathy Wu. If you asked Trevor, he would smile and admit both were excellent reasons.

The HERO Team Lab was the size of a small gymnasium. The Lab and the team's offices were in the temporary Defense Logistics Agency facility on Telegraph Road near Alexandria, Virginia.

Dr. Robert Astalos, the inventor of time travel, had an office and conference room in the Lab. He spent half his time on site and the rest on other projects.

Dr. Astalos' office and conference room were in the east end of the Lab. On the north side were the loading dock doors, one primary and operational Time Engine, two backup Engines under construction, and a row of storage lockers. A break and huddle area with tables and chairs dominated the center of the room. On the west

side was a kitchen and a staircase with access to the roof. The secure entry to the rest of the team's offices was in the south wall.

Kathy was the first to notice the static electricity increase in the room. The primary Time Engine switched on and hummed with increasing pitch and volume.

"Well, here he comes," she said.

"Yup," Trevor said.

The time bubble formed with two figures inside it.

"Damn," Trevor said. "He's got company with him."

He sprinted to the storage cabinet and brought back two sleep bulbs.

The brilliant white air within the bubble spun furiously, whipping the two men's clothing and hair about them like a violent windstorm. Through the blinding light of the time bubble, Kathy recognized one figure as McKnight and that the two men were fighting.

The bubble pulsed, then bulged to twice its previous size and winked out. The travel momentum threw the two men to the floor.

The room seemed dark now without the bubble's brilliant light. Trevor bounded onto the travel platform and squeezed the sleep bulb in the Indian's face. The young brave blinked in surprise and collapsed, unconscious.

McKnight untangled himself from the Indian's limp form and stood.

"Thank you," he said.

"No problem. Did you bring him back here on purpose?"

"No, and yes. I didn't plan it, but it was that or let him get killed by the bubble."

Trevor chuckled. "Well, good. Can we send him back now, then?"

"Yes. Perfect."

"Okay, let's get it done before he wakes up so I don't have to dose him again. Give me your beacon so I can get the point of origin."

McKnight handed Trevor the beacon. Trevor took it with him to the Engine Console.

Kathy came to the edge of the platform and stood in front of McKnight.

"Are you okay, Major? No injuries?"

"No," he said. He stepped off the platform and sat at a table. "Just some insect bites and a bruise or two. I'll make it."

Kathy sat next to him. "Good. Do you have all your equipment, Major? Nothing left behind?"

McKnight straightened. "Yes, sorry. I have everything I took with me. And I brought nothing back..." He pointed back over his shoulder at the Time Engine platform. "Except this guy."

When the time bubble appeared on the platform behind them, they turned toward it. The bubble bulged and disappeared with a loud crack. The sleeping Indian was on his way back to 1786.

Trevor came to the table and sat with them. "Mission accomplished?" he asked.

"No. I didn't even get started."

McKnight turned to Kathy. "I landed on the trail we targeted. Your research was perfect. Unfortunately, the traffic on the trail was much more than we expected. We have to find another landing place if we want to avoid contact with locals. I spent the day hiding from them until..." He pointed at the platform. "Junior there showed up. We need to rethink our landing place on this one."

"Bummer," said Kathy, smiling at him. "I guess somebody will have to go back in the next few days to complete it."

“Yes. I think scouting Washington’s route is still a good idea. We just need a new starting place.”

“Exactly,” Trevor said. He sighed and smiled at Kathy.

Kathy thought McKnight looked sad. It occurred to her that McKnight was thinking the same thing she was.

“Too bad Hatcher isn’t here,” Kathy said. “She would have loved to be a part of this mission.”

“Yes, I know,” McKnight said.

“I miss her,” Kathy said. She patted McKnight’s arm.

“I do, too,” Trevor said.

McKnight stood. “Me, too. If you guys will excuse me, I need to go get cleaned up. I think I’ll take the rest of the day off.”

“Good idea,” Kathy said. “You’ve put in more than a day’s work and we learned something new.”

“I know what I learned,” McKnight said. “I learned not to hide under leaves for four hours. I’m afraid to count the insect bites.”

“Go wash 1786 off yourself and go home,” Kathy said. “And say hello to Megan for me.”

CHAPTER 2

Monday, November 17th, 2036 — 2:13pm — McKnight's office at the HERO Team's offices, Alexandria, Virginia

Situated just eight miles south of Washington DC, the city of Alexandria has a unique character. It has an Old Town section where the buildings are two centuries old, a modern downtown, government agency complexes, and office parks — all mingled with farms and cornfields.

The sky was gray, and snow was in the forecast for northern Virginia.

McKnight hung up the phone and turned to stare through his transparent office wall at the parking lot and the woods beyond it. As was his habit while thinking, he rested his feet on the credenza and put his hands behind his head.

Calls from the Hachers were always depressing. His thoughts went back to that day when he lost their daughter. The family was reassuring to him and always reiterated it wasn't his fault. But as her commanding officer and the leader of the HERO Team, he felt a keen sense of responsibility for Karen Hatcher's disappearance.

Four months ago now, that day was as clear to him as if it had happened ten minutes ago.

They were working a case they stumbled upon by accident. A young girl was missing, and she appeared in a 25-year-old docudrama. It was a time travel crime. Someone kidnapped her, traveled her twenty-five years into the past, and murdered her to embarrass a young, up-and-coming politician. The team saved the girl and realized her murder was the tip of the iceberg of a bigger case.

Cindy Ginn was their new receptionist back then. She came to them with a glowing recommendation from her previous boss, a U.S. Senator. She sailed through her security clearances with flying colors. Nothing in her background suggested she could orchestrate the theft of one of their Time Engines. Their investigation proved she was an imposter, a time traveler, and a skilled operative. When the team exposed and confronted Ginn, she produced a knife and attempted to escape. Lieutenant Hatcher grabbed her from behind just before she time-jumped, and she swept Hatcher along with her to an unknown time. Minutes later, a separate attack disabled their only functioning Time Engine to prevent interference with Ginn's escape. The time travel technology she used suggested she was from the future.

Hatcher had been missing since that day. At McKnight's request, General Drake postponed their planned move to the DLA Headquarters building so they could focus on finding her.

In the days after Hatcher's disappearance, they had hopes of using technology to track Ginn's time jump. Time and time again, they thought they had a breakthrough, some idea that would help them locate and rescue Hatcher. But all the ideas and theories yielded no results.

The team's time scientists Robert and Robby Astalos worked an incredible number of hours to find a solution. When the excessive time spent affected their health, McKnight imposed a work schedule on them to prevent them from working themselves into exhaustion or sickness. After weeks without success, General Drake reluctantly reassigned Robby Astalos to the ongoing propulsion project.

Today, Hatcher's parents called and suggested McKnight give up the search and recognize Karen in a memorial service.

McKnight knew where they were coming from. They were a military family. Connie Hatcher was one of the first female Rangers in the U.S. Army and a general today. Richard Hatcher was a retired colonel from Special Forces.

It wasn't that they didn't love Karen. On the contrary, they were proud of her and were a close-knit family. But they had lost all hope of her returning. They were convinced their daughter was dead and they wanted the agony of uncertainty to end.

McKnight understood because he was losing hope, too. There was no way to resolve her status. Every contact with other military teams eventually led to a cautious question about the search for Lieutenant Hatcher. He knew the others were concerned, but the questions were increasingly discouraging and demoralizing for himself and his team.

He could only guess at how hard it was for her parents.

The truth was, he couldn't grant their request. Karen was MIA and her status couldn't change unless they found her body or the military declared her BNR — presumed dead; body not recovered. But there was no evidence to support either the BNR or KIA status, so Karen's status was in limbo. He grimaced at the thought.

Damned bureaucracy! Paralyzed because the situation was unprecedented.

The family wanted closure, and he couldn't offer it to them.

McKnight closed his eyes and let the memories come back again. Karen was a second generation female Ranger. She was intelligent and one of the best warfighters McKnight had ever known.

Hatcher and Mitch Wheeler were his Time Engine technicians. Both excelled in physics at the University of North Georgia and their skills bloomed under the tutelage of Doctor Astalos. When the HERO Team formed, McKnight hand-selected Wheeler and Hatcher.

The two lieutenants loved each other in the way soldiers do when they work, live, and fight together. Despite his name, Wheeler was Hispanic and his personality was outgoing and friendly. Hatcher was quiet but radiated internal resolve and strength. Their personal skills complemented one another and they were so in tune with each other, McKnight grew accustomed to thinking of them as a unit.

And now Hatcher was missing on his watch. If he hadn't selected her, she would still be alive.

Or at least she'd be here in this time.

That was the hard part. Was she a prisoner in some distant future time, locked away somewhere with no hope of rescue? Or was she already dead?

He couldn't think of a fresh way to approach the problem. He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. Though he didn't know what to do next, he resolved to arrange a memorial service for the family. He was about ready to give up hope.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. He kicked off from the credenza and whirled his chair to sit back at his desk. "Come," he said.

The door opened and Wheeler entered the room and came to attention.

"As you were, Lieutenant," McKnight said. "What's on your mind?"

Wheeler shifted his weight. "Permission to speak frankly, sir?"

"Of course. What?"

"I just talked to Colonel Hatcher, sir. I don't think we should do it, sir. Hold a funeral for Hatcher? It's only been a few months. That's crazy. She's still alive out there somewhere."

"It's not a funeral, Lieutenant. But, for the record, I agree with you. So... do you have any suggestions on how we might go on from here?"

Wheeler hesitated. He glanced at the ceiling, his eyes glistening with the tears he was holding back. He started to speak but couldn't.

McKnight stood and walked around the desk to stand at his side.

Wheeler cleared his throat and spoke with a shaky voice. "She was trying to protect me. And she paid the price for it."

McKnight remembered it well. In the confrontation with Ginn, Wheeler was the first to approach her, and she sliced his face with a knife. Hatcher grabbed the woman from behind, Ginn's time aura engulfed her, and they both vanished. That was the last they saw of Hatcher.

Wheeler's reflexes saved him from a deadly knife thrust to the neck. A skilled team of doctors repaired his damaged cheek and chin. But he still bore a thin scar across his chin that was more visible when he was under stress. Like now.

"Lieutenant?" McKnight said.

Wheeler looked away and McKnight continued. "Mitch."

"Sir, I—"

McKnight pointed to one of the side chairs in his office and sat on the edge of his desk. "Sit down, Mitch."

As Wheeler moved to the chair, McKnight continued. "It wasn't your fault. She was doing her job, just like you were."

"Yes, sir. I know that. But we can't just leave her out there." Wheeler turned toward McKnight. "We never leave one of ours behind. There has to be a way to find her."

"I know. Believe me, I know. The service is intended for the family. We haven't given up. But it doesn't look good, Mitch. I can't think of any more options or ideas. You know Doctor Astalos has worked hard, looking in the time frequency logs for something, anything, that might offer a clue. The future is unknown to us so far. You know Kathy and Trevor are plotting out history ideas to guess what timelines might lead to her, but it's all speculative. There's no genuine science behind it. We just don't have any path forward."

"Yes, sir, I know, but I can't... I just can't give up."

"I know you don't want to hear this, but we don't even know if Cindy's time travel plays by the same rules as ours. We can only access times that are a multiple of twenty-five years from the current date. And we think Cindy came from the future. Her technology was different and faster. Remember? We create a time bubble around the traveler. But she just had a thin aura around herself. When Hatcher grabbed her, the aura expanded to include her and took her. And I never saw her click a beacon. Did you? How do we know there aren't other differences? What if they've solved the twenty-five-year multiple problem? Or even trimmed a month off that limit? We just don't know. We have too many variables."

McKnight paused and looked at Wheeler. The lieutenant was staring at his hands in his lap.

McKnight sighed and softened his tone. "I'm not saying it's impossible. We just don't know enough yet. We won't stop, Mitch. But we need a break. Just a small one. Let's keep thinking about it."

Wheeler looked up at him. "Sir, I can't think about anything else."

McKnight came off the desk, walked around it and sat in his chair. "Yes, I know. It's hard for all of us, but especially for you, I know. You and Hatcher go way back to UNG. Working as closely as you have... I can't imagine how tough it is."

Wheeler leaned back in his chair.

"Lisa, my wife. She doesn't understand. She was never jealous of the bond Hatcher and I had. She loved her, too. But she told me she doesn't know how to help me with this and it's like there's another woman, only she

can't compete with her because it's not the same thing. It's coming between us and neither of us know how to fix it."

"Yes," McKnight said. "I'm dealing with that, too, but not to the extent you are. Look, you have nothing earthshaking pending right now, do you? Why don't you take the rest of the day off? Go home and spend time with Lisa and little Terry. Go to the movies, go play putt-putt. Just leave this behind for a little while."

"I'll be okay, sir. Thanks for listening. I'll check with Doctor Astalos and see what he's working on."

McKnight stood. "Lieutenant, I don't think I made myself clear. Let me try again. Take the rest of the day off. That's an order."

Wheeler jumped up and came to attention. "Yes, sir."

"Is there anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Good. Get out of here."

"Yes, sir." Wheeler saluted and left McKnight's office.

(End of Sample Chapters)