

THE PARADOX

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FADE IN

EXT. DARPA FACILITY - SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - DAY

A nondescript three story building faces a side street, and is partially obscured by trees, shrubs and bamboo.

A black sedan comes down the street, and pulls into the parking lot in the back of the building.

INT. DARPA - LABORATORY

JENNIFER STANLEY, 44 and her boyfriend REGGIE WILLIAMS, 40s, stand in the center of a large laboratory.

Reggie is in full military gear.

They stand next to a wormhole generator, a machine just tall enough for a person to pass through.

Jennifer's workstation is along one of the walls. A laptop sits open, next to several pictures and a land line phone.

One of the pictures is in black and white, and from the Vietnam War. It shows her father along with some fellow soldiers, standing in front of a village schoolhouse.

A whiteboard on wheels is nearby.

DONNA, 20s, approaches Jen.

DONNA
Brass has arrived.

JENNIFER
Wish me luck.

DONNA
Oh, almost forgot - happy birthday.
Did you get to see your dad?

Jen hesitates.

JENNIFER

No, he was busy - as usual.

A MAJOR GENERAL is brought in.

Reggie walks towards the door, and salutes him.

He brings the officer over to Jennifer.

MAJOR GENERAL

I understand this is your project.

The Major General looks at the wormhole machine.

MAJOR GENERAL (CONT'D)

Hope you didn't bring me all this way for nothing.

JENNIFER

I think you'll be satisfied with the results. We've already tested it - several hours into the future.

QUAN TRUNG, 54 enters and carries an atomic battery to the center of the room.

The General watches as he installs it in the machine.

He turns back to Jen.

MAJOR GENERAL

And today's test?

JENNIFER

Today's test will be two weeks.

The Major General grins.

MAJOR GENERAL

One hell of an advantage, knowing what your adversaries are planning.

JENNIFER

And two weeks is by no means the limit.

MAJOR GENERAL

Have you tested it into the past?

JENNIFER

We'd only be wasting the taxpayers' money. Time is linear, and moves in only one direction. Even if -

Quan approaches.

QUAN
I disagree.

MAJOR GENERAL
And who are you?

JENNIFER
(slightly agitated)
This is Quan Trung. He's assisted
me on the project, and developed
the power pack.

Quan walks over to the whiteboard. He draws a series of dots,
and connects them with a straight line.

QUAN
Time is like space; infinite in all
directions. There's nothing to stop
you from returning to any moment in
time, much like you can return to a
certain location in space.

MAJOR GENERAL
You're losing me, Quan.

Quan touches his fist to several of the dots.

QUAN
Every single moment in time still
exists. It is simply WE that have
moved on.

Jen shakes her head.

JENNIFER
That's not the case. Once a moment
in time passes, it's gone forever -

QUAN
Imagine going back in time to
correct certain things, like
prevent the assassination of your
President Lincoln.

Donna plays referee, and motions at the group.

DONNA
Okay, everyone please step over to
the wormhole so we can get on with
today's activity.

Jen walks over to the machine.

Quan stands next to her, and watches closely as she runs a program.

A magnetic field begins to hum.

Jen looks over at Reggie, and forces a weak smile.

She steps through the machine.

EXT. HOUSE - SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - DAY

A one bedroom efficiency sits in the backyard of a large house in an upscale neighborhood in southern California.

A bright green 57 Chevy sits along the side of the house.

INT. EFFICIENCY - BEDROOM

MITCH STANLEY, 70 is alone in his bedroom. He stands over an old desk, and goes through some paperwork.

He wears jeans and a faded T-shirt.

He sits on the bed, reaches underneath to slide out a small metal GI foot locker, and opens it.

Mitch takes out a recent news clipping, about the suicide of a man roughly his age.

MITCH

Always figured you'd be the last.

He goes through the contents of the locker, which includes a Medal of Honor, and a 1969 newspaper headline that shows that most of the nation now opposes the Vietnam war.

Mitch closes up the locker and slides it back underneath.

He glances at a Smith and Wesson pistol that lies on the bed.

Mitch reaches out and grabs a pillow. He holds it up to one side of his face.

He picks up the pistol, and brings it to his temple.

He mouths a short prayer, and squeezes off a single shot.

INT. DARPA - LABORATORY

Quan, Reggie, Donna and the Major General are in the lab, and stand near the wormhole generator.

Jennifer is not in the room.

Reggie has a concerned look as he stares at the machine.

They all react as the magnetic field grows steadily louder.

The Major General approaches the machine, and has to take a step back as Jen comes out.

She staggers slightly.

Reggie helps her regain her balance.

REGGIE

You okay?

JENNIFER

Yeah - just a little light headed.

MAJOR GENERAL

What happened in there?

JENNIFER

I was here, in the lab, but nobody else.

MAJOR GENERAL

What can you tell us? I mean, I need *proof*.

JENNIFER

Two weeks from today, at 10:45 am, there will be a thirteen-car pileup, near the Port.

He nods his head.

MAJOR GENERAL

I will be back in two weeks.

The Major General leaves.

DONNA

(excited)

In two weeks, you'll be famous.

Jen is still shaken.

JENNIFER

Not really. I imagine this will be kept under wraps for a long time.

REGGIE

But the Army will have a new superweapon.

DONNA

Screw the Army. I think you should sell tickets.

The land line rings.

Donna walks over, and answers it.

She looks back at Jen.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Hey, it's your dad's landlord. Says he needs to speak to you.

ONE WEEK LATER

EXT. CENTRAL VIETNAM - RIVER - MORNING

Jennifer and Reggie sweat as they walk towards a river that runs near a Vietnamese village.

They both carry backpacks.

Reggie looks over at Jen, who is lost in thought.

REGGIE

You know you won't get anything out of your project.

She glances at the river up ahead.

JENNIFER

What do you mean?

REGGIE

Well, we can't inform the press. And you won't even be considered for the Nobel Prize.

JENNIFER

It's what I signed up for.

REGGIE

I know one thing. It definitely gives the army a huge advantage.

They get to the bank of the river and stop.

JENNIFER

This looks like a nice spot.

Jen sets down her backpack, and sighs.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I got him that place so he would be nearby...so we could have lunch together once in a while. And all he ever did was stay home.

REGGIE

It's just the way he was, babe.

Jen stares out over the water.

JENNIFER

All those times I invited him to come over. And every single time, a different excuse.

REGGIE

You did everything you could to try and reach him. Don't punish yourself like this.

JENNIFER

I guess.

REGGIE

It was a shame, how he just seemed to give up on everything.

JENNIFER

Including me.

Her hand shakes as she pulls out a plain scattering tube.

Mitch's dog tags come out as well, and fall to the ground.

Reggie picks up the tags.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

This is just like him, you know, to STILL be as far away from me as possible, even now.

She begins to unscrew the tube, then stops.

REGGIE

I don't think he -

JENNIFER
Never cared about me, or my career.

Jen screws the cannister back together.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Selfish bastard - I hate him!

She grits her teeth as she heaves the scattering tube as far as she can out into the river.

Reggie steps closer.

REGGIE
You okay?

JENNIFER
I hate him - I hate him!

Jen kicks at the ground repeatedly.

Reggie holds her, until she finally breaks down and cries.

(Beat)

They watch as the current takes the tube away.

Reggie hands her the dog tags.

Jen laughs through her tears.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
God, I couldn't even do this right.
Where am I going to keep these now?

She stares at the name on the dog tags: MITCH STANLEY.

Jen squeezes the tags, and drops them into her backpack.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Reggie and Jen stop as they enter the village.

Jen pulls out her cell.

JENNIFER
I need to check my messages.

She looks at her phone, which shows numerous texts and missed calls, almost all from the same number.

Jen reads the texts.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

What the hell? Someone broke into my lab...the battery and graphene are both missing.

Reggie gives her a puzzled look as she quickly hits the call button.

Donna answers on the first ring.

Jen yells into the phone.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

What do you mean, missing? Who took it?

DONNA

(via phone)

We're not sure, but surveillance cameras show that Quan walked into the building around eight -

JENNIFER

Quan - what was he doing there?

DONNA

Not sure - the tape got erased. There's no footage for over two hours. And, we can't reach Quan.

JENNIFER

What about the generator?

DONNA

It's intact, from what we can tell. But there's more. I hacked into Quan's computer and...

EXT. VILLAGE - MAIN STREET

Jen and Reggie walk around the center of the village.

JENNIFER

I can't understand why Quan would steal his own power pack.

REGGIE

Maybe he's trying to build his own portal.

JENNIFER

I don't know what he's up to.
Donna said she found searches on
his computer about the Vietnam War,
and a Colonel Trung.

REGGIE

Who's that?

JENNIFER

He was on the other side during the
war, and was responsible for a
massacre of a village in 1968.

Jen begins to pace.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

The picture of my dad is missing.
You know, the one from the war.

REGGIE

Was Quan's father in the same unit
as your's?

JENNIFER

He never mentioned it to me. I do
know that Quan's father was killed
during the war. Trung might be the
guy that killed him.

REGGIE

Any idea where he went?

JENNIFER

Donna said he'd been emailing his
brother, who came over here a few
weeks ago. This same village -

She glances at her phone as it vibrates.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Donna just sent me pictures of
Quan. Let's see if any of these
villagers have seen him.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - ABANDONED BUILDING

An abandoned store sits about a mile away from the village.

The windows are boarded up, and the front entrance has only
the remnants of a screen door.

INT. TUNNEL

Two men with backpacks crouch as they navigate a network of tunnels well below the store.

They enter a small room at the end of a tunnel.

The wormhole generator sits inside the room.

Quan admires the machine as he stands with his brother BAO, 56, who is quite a bit larger.

Quan removes his backpack, and inspects the machine.

QUAN

I am proud of you, my brother.
Exactly per the specifications
that I sent to you.

BAO

But are you sure this will work?

Quan pats his brother on the shoulder.

QUAN

I am sure.

Quan removes the atomic battery from his backpack, and inserts it into the machine.

The magnetic field hums steadily.

Bao shifts nervously from one foot to the other.

Quan smiles at his brother, moves closer and puts his hand on his brothers chest.

QUAN (CONT'D)

Such a small heart... for such a
big man.

Bao knocks his hand away.

BAO

I hope you are right. For our sake,
and for *his*.

QUAN

Our father was denied having a full
life. Now we have the opportunity
to go back and change that.

Quan runs a test program.

The machine glows, and the magnetic field gets louder.

BAO
But why risk making contact?

QUAN
I want to give him knowledge of
what is to come, so his career will
continue to advance.

BAO
And our circumstances will be *much*
different when we return.

Quan goes through Bao's backpack, and pulls out a packet.

He picks up the packet, checks the contents, and puts both
their cell phones inside.

BAO (CONT'D)
We need weapons.

QUAN
No. No weapons.

Bao is perplexed.

BAO
His men will shoot us before we
even get near him.

QUAN
Not if we're unarmed. The best way
to locate him is to get captured -
his men will take us to him so he
can interrogate us.

BAO
And what do we tell him?

QUAN
The truth.

Quan motions at the machine.

Bao hesitates as he approaches the machine.

Bao steps through, followed by Quan.

INT. ABANDONED STORE

Jen and Reggie are inside the abandoned store. There is dust
on the counter, and the gondolas have empty shelves.

Jen looks around.

JENNIFER

Do you think that villager knew
what we were asking him?

REGGIE

We may have lost something in
the translation, but this is the
building he pointed to.

JENNIFER

I'm not sure if Quan, or anybody
else, has been here for a while.

Reggie looks down and notices a new storm drain, partially
covered by one of the gondolas.

REGGIE

Huh - that doesn't look right.

They push the gondola off the drain.

Reggie bends down and struggles to lift it.

Jen retrieves a flashlight from her backpack.

She aims it down into the opening.

JENNIFER

Could be the entrance of a tunnel.

They lower themselves down.

INT. TUNNEL

Jen and Reggie crouch as they continue to walk along the
intricate tunnel system.

Reggie looks at some of the rooms that are just off a long
corridor.

REGGIE

It looks like the whole damn
village used to live down here.

JENNIFER

Quan's crazy if he thinks he can
just go back in time and prevent
his father's death.

REGGIE

You have to admit, it is kind of admirable.

JENNIFER

There's nothing admirable about it. It's dangerous. He has no way of knowing the possible ramifications of his actions.

They're interrupted by an extremely loud sound that emanates from the room at the end of the tunnel.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

That's the magnetic field.

They race along the tunnel, which winds around and eventually leads to the room with the wormhole generator.

Reggie enters, followed by Jen.

Quan and Bao are gone. The room is lit up by the machine, which begins to quiet down.

Jen walks over to the machine, and studies it.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch. He built a replica.

REGGIE

How is that even possible?

She looks at Reggie.

JENNIFER

We have to follow them.

He glances at the wormhole generator.

REGGIE

So we're going into a war zone with what, just our backpacks?

JENNIFER

I don't want to lose him.

Reggie pulls out his phone.

REGGIE

We should at least research this village, the way it was back then.

JENNIFER

You're right.

She pulls out her phone.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
And we'll need a good cover story.

VIETNAM, 1968

EXT. COLONEL TRUNG HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Colonel Trung's communist headquarters sits near the same village in central Vietnam.

It consists of the main building, and a concrete building that stands despite several bombing attempts.

A broken down jeep sits between the two buildings.

INT. COLONEL TRUNG HEADQUARTERS

Quan and Bao are held prisoner by COLONEL TRUNG, late 20s, and some of his NVA guards.

They both show signs of mild torture.

Colonel Trung paces the floor.

He holds up one of their cell phones, studies it and tosses it on the ground.

COL. TRUNG
How did you locate my headquarters?

QUAN
I am telling you the truth - we are from the future.

Trung smacks him.

COL. TRUNG
Stop lying. You were sent here to assassinate me.

BAO
Then why don't we have guns?

COL. TRUNG
There are other ways to kill a man.

Trung studies the picture of GI-Mitch and his unit.

QUAN

Time is critical. You will be killed by these Americans very soon, unless we change things.

COL. TRUNG

Which one of them?

QUAN

We don't know which one. We must get them all.

Trung looks at the guard.

COL. TRUNG

Keep them here for now.

EXT. JUNGLE - FOOT PATH - DAY

Jen and Reggie follow a boy guide along a wide foot path, that snakes it's way through the jungle.

They both have backpacks, and Reggie carries an old camera on a shoulder strap.

They hear gun shots in the distance.

The boy glances back at them.

BOY GUIDE

You are soldiers?

REGGIE

No - journalists.

JENNIFER

(to Reggie)

We need to find Quan, and get him to come back with us.

REGGIE

You know, he may not listen to you.

JENNIFER

(adamant)

He needs to.

REGGIE

Is it really such a bad thing - that he wants to save his father?

Jen bristles.

JENNIFER

There's more to it than that.
Donna said that Quan researched the
financial markets and technology
breakthroughs of the seventies.

The boy motions at them.

BOY GUIDE

Keep your voices down. The VC, they
are everywhere.

He points to the surroundings.

Jen pulls closer to Reggie.

FURTHER DOWN THE FOOT PATH

Jen walks next to Reggie and the guide.

The boy spots a trip wire on the ground.

He yells out as Reggie's boot hits the wire.

A spiked concrete ball suspended from a nearby tree begins to
swing down at Reggie.

Reggie dives out of the way as it misses him by inches.

JENNIFER

My God, are you all right?

Jen and the boy help Reggie get to his feet.

Reggie is visibly shaken.

REGGIE

I'm... okay.

They continue to walk on the path, and pass a dead Vietnamese
man lying partially on the path.

Maggots crawl over his body.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Guess he wasn't as lucky.

BOY GUIDE

The VC - they put him there. They
think these dead bodies will
frighten us, but they don't.

EXT. MARY'S VILLAGE - SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

A schoolhouse sits near one end of the village. There are several huts, with a hand-crank water well between them.

Several children chase some pigs nearby.

MARY, 20 a Vietnamese teacher stands outside the schoolhouse with a group of villagers.

She wears a Cross necklace, and a distinctive bamboo hat with three palm leaves.

Jen and Reggie are nearby.

Jen pulls a clipboard from her backpack, and approaches Mary.

Reggie stays a few steps behind, and pretends to take some pictures.

JENNIFER

Hi, we're with the LA Times.
Could we talk a minute?

MARY

Sure.

Colonel Trung leads a group of his soldiers as they enter the opposite end of the village.

He brandishes his pistol, and the NVA soldiers have sub-machine guns.

REGGIE

Looks like trouble.

MARY

That is Colonel Trung's men. Need
stay away from them.

Jen glances at Reggie, then looks at Mary.

JENNIFER

Why is he here?

MARY

He comes to our village spreading
propaganda against the Americans.

The NVA men move around under the watchful eye of Mary.

Col. Trung stops at the water well and slowly takes a drink.

He smiles at some of the children.

Mary walks over to Col. Trung and forces herself to be pleasant.

MARY (CONT'D)
Hello Colonel Trung. What brings you here today?

COL. TRUNG
The same reason I came here last time. I need to know where these men are hiding.

He produces a list of names, which Mary studies.

MARY
And like I told you, I do not know. I am truly sorry I cannot help you.

COL. TRUNG
(firm)
Just remember who's side you need to be on. My patience will not last forever.

Trung motions at his men, and they follow him as he leaves the village.

Mary heads back towards the schoolhouse.

GI-MITCH STANLEY, 18 enters the village from the other side, and approaches Mary.

He carries an M16 assault rifle over his shoulder, and a bag of apples which he gives Mary.

GI-MITCH
These are for you.

MARY
Oh, I just love apples.

They smile at each other.

Mary turns towards Jen and Reggie.

MARY (CONT'D)
They are some journalists.

GI-Mitch approaches Jen.

She does not recognize her father at first.

GI-MITCH
Hello, I'm Mitch Stanley. Pleasure
to meet ya.

JENNIFER
Hi, I'm Jennifer. And this is...

She starts to turn towards Reggie.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Did you say Mitch Stanley? That's
my father's name...

Jen catches herself.

She lets out a nervous laugh.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
I mean, the Mitch part.

Reggie steps in.

REGGIE
And I'm Reggie Williams. We're
both...reporters.

GI-MITCH
Nice meetin' ya both.

He shakes their hands.

GI-Mitch turns, and continues to flirt with Mary.

Mary giggles.

Jen and Reggie step away from them.

JENNIFER
Oh my God. Is... that really my
father?

REGGIE
He does seem... different.

Jen struggles to keep her composure.

She takes a deep breath.

JENNIFER
Quan's father must be nearby. I'll
ask my father...Mitch, if we can go
back to his camp with him.