

## Revolution Time

by Lavie Tidhar

*Story Copyright (C) 2007, Lavie Tidhar.  
Images Copyright (C) 2007, Rudy Rucker.  
4,000 Words.*

It was night when we set out to capture the time machine.

It ends in daylight though, and begins... it begins sometime in the middle of the day, when the sun beats down on your skin and you suddenly realise how close the desert is to Hope.

I was standing outside the Chrono Building trying to look like a tourist.

Which wasn't that difficult, really. The Chrono Building is the seventh most visited buildings in the United States – it says so in large block letters outside – and the main reason tourists come to Hope, Nevada - my home town - at all. They stood all around me on the broad pavilion across the road from the institute, wearing a uniform expression of detached interest, aiming cameras at the building. I took several pictures, more to blend in than for any real use. I knew that the building, the iron-wrought gate, the ivy and the two security guards outside were an expensive-looking façade, no more real than most of the government's lies.

All aspects of a job must be studied carefully before undertaken, however. I'm quoting my recruiter to the Movement, Mr. Gideon Nehru, here. It used to be one of his favourite maxims. So I did my part, photographed the building, the outlying streets, possible entrances, how often the guards changed... grunt work, and redundant besides, since everyone knows the real body of the institute is several miles away, where the town ends and the desert begins. Like Area 51 in its time, it's a badly-kept secret.

I'd already spent over a week side-tracked to this part of the operation. It wasn't only the building, of course. I made note of the researchers and politicians who came through the building, making detailed photographic records of each one. I knocked on doors in various pretences to try and determine possible observation posts, escape routes, pick up rumours and gossip which may prove useful.

Satisfied at last that I could finish my watch, I made my way with the other tourists to the Underground station, and took the train to the cell's meeting place.

There were four members in my cell. Joe, a tall, thin Thai who, as a student at the local university, was on temporary reassignment from the unions in Bangkok. Monty, from the Outer Kibbutz Movement, short and dark haired and intense.

Myself.

And Morgan... skin as white as only an English girl's can be, hair and eyes that were pure darkness. She was Grand Mistress of a splinter Wicca group with a socialist/anarchist bend from across the Atlantic.

I was the only local, but it was Joe who was going to get us in. His degree was in physics and time theory, and the university's closeness to the edge of town put it in close proximity to the Chrono

Institute's underground research base. One day Joe got lost in the university's basement – quite why we never found out – when he happened on a disused corridor. It was dark, he said, and his steps left imprints in the fine layer of dust lying on the floor. He was about to turn around when he thought he heard voices, coming from farther down the corridor. They were indistinguishable, he said, like a far-away murmur. He decided to investigate.

At the end of the corridor was an air-vent. There was no air coming through, and the blades have stopped rotating a long time ago. Joe peered through them, catching the sight of moving shadows and the echo of footsteps.

“I don't see why you necessarily think it leads to the Chrono area,” Monty said, playing devil's advocate. It was a month earlier, at the usual place: The Trotsky, a damp, dark watering hole in a run-down part of town which, rumour had it, was once visited by the man himself, in his own dark, yet colourful, past.

“Where else would it lead, man?” Morgan sparked up a joint and stared at him across the table. The smoke framed her face like the shape of a heart. “*I* wouldn't be here –” she waved her finger at him, “and *you* wouldn't be here, if it wasn't something both of our respective organisations thought was worth pursuing.”

I smiled, admiring her strength and her energy. Monty scowled. “Take that puppy-dog-in-love look off your face. It's embarrassing. And you,” he said, addressing Morgan, “should know better than to get your hopes up. After all, as the saying goes, they only ever bring back Shakespeare.”

Morgan nodded, maintaining her stare. “Still, enough to bring you down from the Belt to some hellhole in the middle of the United States.”

“Hey,” I said. They ignored me.

“True,” Monty finally conceded, spreading his hands on the table. “I'd rather be up at the kibbutz, taking on those sons of bitches from the mining corporations. And most likely this *is* nothing. But if it can work...” his face lost its intensity for a moment. “If we can bring him back, we can have a real chance at a revolution.”

“Why do they always bring back Shakespeare?”

I asked my grandfather that once, on a day the papers were full of yet another of the bard's brief visits to the twenty-first.

Granddad shook his head. “He's famous,” he said, “in a non-confrontational way. Sure, the playwrights protested at first, and there was the worry about grad students trying to do all kinds of horrible things to him –” I couldn't tell if he was joking or not as he said it – “but everyone likes Shakespeare, in a vague sort of way.” He shook his head again, and his eyes, when he looked at me were still like those of a child, clear-blue and wide. “If only we could bring back someone who could make a difference,” he said. “Someone who could *help*.”

“Yes!” I said when Joe first told me of his discovery. I was his contact to Hope's own Socialist underground, and even though I suspected Bangkok was informed long before I was, my excitement was not affected. Joe nodded enthusiastically. “You have to pass this along to your Committee,” he said.

“And I’ll do the same with my people.”

I didn’t dare suggest that he already did. I got in touch with my own contact, not specifying the exact nature of what I needed to tell the committee. She, in turn – and after interrogating me for several minutes without results - got in touch with hers, and a mere hour later I was summoned to an address I was not given before, to meet personally with the Committee.

To my surprise, Joe was already there when I came in.

It was a nondescript building in a nondescript suburb. The three men and three women who regarded us in silence were on the whole themselves nondescript. Their aura of authority, however, was unmistakable.

They thanked us for coming, offered us a cup of tea, and then, dismissing the formalities of manners, began asking us questions. Well, Joe mainly.

After two hours we were asked to wait in the kitchen of the house, where a man with a discreet bulge for a gun kept us company, making coffee without speaking.

When we were called back, the Committee had made a decision. Our new cell was set up there and then: Morgan and Monty had appeared the next day, in the early morning.

By noon, we started preparing for the raid.

It was night when we set out to capture the time machine.

I wasn’t even supposed to go. The event itself, the raid (though I thought of it as a kind of a heist) was to be carried out by pros, and the movement did not consider me proper combat material.

But I managed to come along. A last minute argument, pulled out of thin air: the need for a reception committee. Monty, taut as a wire and carrying two enormous guns that made him look like a deadly leprechaun, was unconvinced at first, but a sense of decorum, a respect for the man we were going to bring forward finally prevailed, and I was allowed to tag along, at the rear of the operation.

The Movement had pulled out all the stops. Not only the Socialist Alliance, who donated the bodies for the operation, but the Kibbutz movement, sending out stealth satellites from their bases on the asteroids, to sit at one geo-stationary position above Hope, Nevada, USA, and send our ground troops real-time information. Morgan’s Wicca group brought with them the weaponry, a military-grade classified arsenal that no one dared ask where they had acquired it.

I was supposed to tag after Morgan, which I didn’t object to at all.

We set out at dark, moving in silent, black vehicles through different routes within the city, then converged together into a line as we left the suburbs and entered the desert.

The real work, of course, would have been done underground, through the entry Joe had discovered. Our mission was to cover things above-ground, and to make our way in when the place was secure. We drove over the desert, and I sat there and listened to burly Comrades discussing satellite positions, and getaways, and entrances. Finally we stopped, over an area of desert that looked to me like any of the

ones we passed before.

The driver said something on her comm. link. Then, like a negative version of Moses parting the seas, the ground began to unfold beneath us, so that we were slowly being immersed in sand and pebbles.

Then we were no longer on the surface but underneath it, in a hangar of shiny, gleaming metal.

We got out of the vehicles in silence, carrying guns – only half-competently in my case – but relaxed as Joe's familiar face appeared among the vehicles.

“All done,” he said, almost rubbing his hands in glee. His accent was stronger when he got excited. He beckoned theatrically to Morgan and myself.

“Shall we?”

The machine was disappointingly small. A small, high-ceilinged room, a bed – there for no reason I could discern – and a small area with marked symbols in red paint. Small was the word you immediately associated with that room.

I can't say I understood the science underlying the process. The person brought back, Joe tried to explain to me once, was converted into pure energy which was then displaced into our own time, ejecting a similar sphere of energy into a hypothetical other universe.

“What do you mean hypothetical? I said.

Joe shrugged. “It's only a theory,” he said. “All I know is that when you bring someone forward, something here has to give.”

Right now, I didn't want to think about that.

I waited, feeling my palms itch as I began to sweat, waiting for the moment. Morgan flicked her hair at me, a rare smile on her face, as she took over the controls behind the armoured glass that shielded the narrow control room.

I was the only one standing in the room. I tried to smile back at Morgan, seeing she had already forgotten me and was busy with the controls. Two armed Comrades stood by her sides, eyes moving around the room.

“Here we go...” Morgan's voice, coming from a hidden speaker.

There was a... shift. It was as if something invisible had suddenly curled, and in its movement took me, and the room, with it. It only lasted for a fraction of a second (.0001 of a second, Joe informed me later. Exactly.) and when it was over, almost before it had began, he was there with me.

Marx.

‘Oh, hello?’ he said in a puzzled voice, peering at me.

I don't know what I expected. Perhaps shock, or anger, or fear at being transplanted in an instance into

a strange and unfamiliar world.

“Karl Marx?” I said, my mouth dry. My right hand edged forward for shake.

“Yes?” still that tone of puzzlement as he shook my hand. Then his gaze shifted, and as I turned I saw Morgan giving us a thumbs-up and motioning to the Comrades at once, looking radiant.

Marx smiled at her, and I realised then that the Marx we had brought up was not the elderly statesman I’d had in mind, but a fit, healthy-looking man in his late thirties, a man who carried himself well and could command attention by the simple fact of his presence.

I saw him smile at Morgan and felt an unexpected suspicion of the man, an irrational bout of jealousy.

“Come on!” Morgan’s voice cut through my thoughts. Two armed men grabbed Marx and I quickly joined behind as we ran out of the time machine’s room.

“The surge of power would have alerted anyone within a thirty-mile radius,” Joe said, running besides me. “We need to get out of here quick.”

The cars Morgan and I came by were out getaway cars. Escape through the tunnels would have been impossible with an alert on, but with the cars, and with the equipment we carried (not to mention the electronic surveillance over our heads) we were going to get away with it.

We had Marx.

And, as Monty had said earlier, we finally had a chance at a revolution.

Rain began to fall as we drove across the Nevada desert, the wheels throwing dark mud as we sped away from the Chrono Institute’s underground complex. I sat opposite Marx in the van, with Morgan pressed uncomfortably close to his side.

The air was full of murmured discussion as the driver and the rest of the liberation force were communicating with the Committee, surveying the land, and looking out for any government attack. We didn’t know what kind of powers would be unleashed following a successful raid on the time machine, but had no doubt they would be terrible and awesome.

I had finally finished briefing Marx, trying to explain our technological wonders together with our complex politics and the reason for his retrieval, as it were, from the past.

Marx didn’t look too impressed with either. In fact, he seemed curiously uncurious, accepting his situation with total apparent calm. Only now, as the car was speeding and the sound of helicopter rotors sounded, approaching fast, sending a gale-force sand storm at us, did Marx show any visible emotion.

He looked excited.

He was almost like a child at that moment, his face pressed to the darkened windows, his eyes large and round behind the glasses.

He began talking animatedly with Morgan, for the most part ignoring me. He was delighted to discover

she spoke fluent German, and soon was chattering away to her, occasionally touching her shoulder, brushing against her leg, as he strove to explain a particular point.

I tried to control the burst of anger I felt. After all, Morgan and I had no arrangement, no ties to each other. She said she needed some company a week into the operation, and allowed me to make a move on her, which I did, which led to what I suspected was a one-night stand. She was appreciative, and after the event distant, losing interest just as my own was becoming all-consuming.

The helicopter that approached was one of ours, a government-style black vehicle with no identifying marks. Marx, Morgan and myself got on it, finding it piloted by Monty, a demonic grin on his face, and a nervous-looking Joe already by his side.

We sped up into the air, shooting like a dark bullet across the acrid landscape, spiriting Marx away from the time machine, away from the enemy troops. Already, by committing to this act, by taking on the government and winning, we had seen them as the enemy. Already, the war was started, and already, though I didn't know it, the outcome was formed.

We were already at war, and the revolution had begun.

The next few weeks were a flurry of activity. We had changed transport again and again that night, moved from secret location to secret location as the government's forces hunted us across the continent. When we were judged safe, on a remote base high in the Black Hills, we had started to broadcast the message to the people of America.

Marx was the rallying point. Marx was the face of the revolution. We got him to make speeches that were written for him weeks in advance; sent photos of him with Committee leaders over the communication networks, photos of Marx speaking, of Marx lecturing, of Marx giving orders, moving the revolution forward. He was on banners across the country, his image on computer desktops in thousands of houses, his voice on the radio, jamming the commercial stations, his rhetoric on cable and satellite television.

He took it rather well. He must have sensed his position, here, was one of figurehead, not leader, but I could tell the action excited him. He would not have lived to see a revolution in his time, he knew that now. And being able to participate, to fight for the cause, to - in an important sense - *lead* the revolution, that was important to him.

After a few days at the mountain camp, I came out of my hut (shared with three other Comrades) in the early morning to see Morgan come out of Marx's quarters, a luxurious chalet that sat at the heart of the camp.

When she saw me she waved, but before I could respond she disappeared into the fog, leaving me standing there with the irrational wish that Joe would never have found the entrance to the Chrono Institute's labs, never would have led me to that small room and the time machine inside it which had taken away the woman I loved.

But the revolution was going well. We were gathering forces, stealth ones in orbit, silent and dark, and small groups of people on the ground, converging together into a massive, if disorganised, army.

When the attack began we were all there together, Marx's entourage, travelling with him to newly-conquered areas, to army-camps, to the front, where Marx insisted on being for most of the time, as excited as a child in a sandbox.

The war progressed satisfactorily; until we reached Washington.

I was on the steps to the White House when the first missiles hit, and I jumped over Marx, covering his body with mine as masonry rained down on us. He pushed me away and stood up, oblivious to the noise, and dusted himself off.

"Are you crazy?" I shouted, my voice fading in the storm of dust and smoke into nothing. I grabbed him and carried him into the cover of the White House's lobby. There was no one around. The President, so we'd heard, had abandoned Washington weeks before. Before we left I could see it in my mind's eye: The Battle for the White House. The last, most glorious battle of the revolution.

Now, from my vantage view in the building itself, my former dream did not look that convincing.

Marx turned to me. "You should leave while you still can," he said in a soft voice. I had to strain to hear him. "Parts of the building are booby-trapped."

"How do you know?" I shouted.

He smiled and – and this had stuck with me ever since, the almost comic nature of his act in the middle of this desolation – tapped his nose.

There was another missile hit, close by, throwing us to the ground again. "Fuck this." I grabbed him, throwing him onto my back without ceremony, and ran into the White House's maze of corridors.

"I'm going to have to go." Marx's voice came strangled from his upside down position.

"What do you mean you're gonna have to go?" I yelled over the shrieks of artillery. I couldn't believe this, freaking out about Marx, of all people Marx, weighing down on my shoulder.

"Put me down, you idiot!" He started to wriggle and I was forced to release him.

He glared at me, oblivious to the bombing.

"About now."

"What?" I turned in the direction of his gaze, saw Monty and Morgan come running towards us.

"How did you...?" I didn't get to finish the question. Another missile hit twenty meters down the hallway, knocking all of us but Marx to the ground.

He turned to us, his face thoughtful. "I am sorry, comrades," he said. He scratched his beard. "What you tried to do is noble and worthy, and I wish it would have succeeded." He paused again. "It won't. The government forces are prepared to use nuclear devices. In two days, Washington D.C – and subsequently half of the U.S – will be wiped out by atomic bombs. I wish it wasn't this way. My advice to you is to escape now. Head to the coast, find a place to lie low, to start again. If you stay here you'll

die.” As if to affirm his words another explosion shook the ground. “For you, especially,” he said, looking down at Morgan and smiling with a wistful air. “I hope you choose to escape.”

Morgan glared at him, blushes of anger appearing on her face.

“But there is good news!” Marx cried, his air of sad contemplation lifted.

I looked at him in the midst of that carnage and wondered if he had lost his mind.

“There will be another revolution in the twenty-eighth,” he said, the last words I would ever hear him say – “and this time, comrades, we will succeed!”

He saluted us then, looking both wild and jubilant, and then there was a... shift. It was as if something invisible had suddenly unfurled, and in its movement took the four of us, and the ruins of the White House, with it. It only lasted for a fraction of a second, and when it was over, almost before it had began, Marx had disappeared.

They called it the Summer of Love, in the years to come. As if the mushroom clouds above Washington and New York, and over half the Midwest, were somehow heart-shaped; they said Love was in the air when the wind shifted and fallout blew, a burning love, all-consuming, dangerous. It had acquired the capital easily.

Monty had died somewhere over Kansas, two days after Marx disappeared. His RLV, in trying to escape the outer layers of the atmosphere into safe orbit, suddenly blew up. It was suspected, though never proved, that the launch vehicle was sabotaged: whether by government agents or due to the anger of the Committee no one wanted to speculate.

Joe stayed behind, assuming an organisational role behind the scenes. He survived the bombs and the fall-out and the purges, and went on to assume leadership of the much-beaten Movement. I know he remembers Marx’s words, and believes in them. If anyone can make us ready for a successful revolution in eight centuries it’s him.

For myself, I had decided the moment Marx’s words penetrated that I was getting out. I set back through our forces, until I could slip out and make my way, as quickly as I could, to the coast.

Morgan, somewhat to my surprise, had decided to join me.

We are settled now, in peace with ourselves. Marx’s apparent betrayal shook Morgan: these days, she is a political analyst at a local institute, studying foreign politics, and while she is cynical she remains, deep down, passionate. I had enrolled at college again, studying marine biology. The plethora of mutated water life that is emerging now is as fascinating as it is disturbing.

Sometime we talk about burying a little time-capsule in the ground, with a final message for Marx, a letter or a short video-message.

And each time we laugh together, and sip our wine, and leave the future to take care of itself.

After all, we know what it holds.



There will be a revolution.

And it will succeed.

--End--

#### About the Author

[Lavie Tidhar](#) grew up on a kibbutz in Israel, lived in Israel and South Africa, travelled widely in Africa and Asia, and has lived in London for a number of years. From March 2007 he will be moving to a remote island in Vanuatu, the South Pacific. He is the winner of the 2003 Clarke-Bradbury Prize (awarded by the European Space Agency), was the editor of *Michael Marshall Smith: The Annotated Bibliography* (PS Publishing, 2004) and the anthology *A Dick & Jane Primer for Adults* (The British Fantasy Society, forthcoming 2007), and is the author of the novella *An Occupation of Angels* (Pendragon Press, 2005). His stories appear in *Sci Fiction*, *Strange Horizons*, *Chizine*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *Postscripts*, *Clarksword Magazine* and many others, and in translation in seven languages.