

The Best Time Travel Stories of the 20th Century: Stories by Arthur C. Clarke, Jack Finney, Joe Haldeman, Ursula K. Le Guin,

From Turtledove, Harry (EDT)/ Greenberg, Martin Harry (EDT)

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"A Sound of Thunder" Ray Bradbury's haunting vision of modern man gone dinosaur hunting poses daunting questions about destiny and consequences.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap
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About the Author
Harry Turtledove was born in Los Angeles in 1949. He has taught ancient and medieval history at UCLA, Cal State Fullerton, and Cal State L.A., and has published a translation of a ninth-century Byzantine chronicle, as well as several scholarly articles. He is also an award-winning full-time writer of science fiction and fantasy. His alternate history works have included several short stories and novels, including *The Guns of the South*; *How Few Remain* (winner of the Sidewise Award for Best Novel); the Great War epics: *American Front, Walk in Hell*, and *Breakthroughs*; the Colonization books: *Second Contact*, *Down to Earth*, and *Aftershocks*; American Empire novels: *Blood and Iron*, *The Center Cannot Hold*, and *Victorious Opposition*; and *Ruled Britannia*. He is married to fellow novelist Laura Frankos. They have three daughters: Alison, Rachel, and Rebecca.

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THEODORE STURGEON

Theodore Sturgeon’s (1918–1985) fiction abounds with ordinary characters undone by their all-too-human shortcomings or struggling in unsympathetic environments to find others who share their desires and feelings of loneliness. Sturgeon began publishing science fiction in 1939, and made his mark early in both fantasy and science fiction with stories that have since become classics. “Microcosmic God” concerns a scientist

who plays God with unexpectedly amusing results when he repeatedly challenges a microscopic race he has created with threats to their survival. “It” focuses on the reactions of characters in a rural setting trying to contend with a rampaging inhuman monster. “Killdozer” is a variation on the theme of Frankenstein in which a construction crew is trapped on an island where a bulldozer has become imbued with the electrical energy of an alien life form.

Fiction Sturgeon wrote after World War II showed the gentle humor of his earlier work shading into pathos. “Memorial” and “Thunder and Roses” were cautionary tales about the abuses of use of nuclear weapons. “A Saucer of Loneliness” and “Maturity” both used traditional science- fiction scenarios to explore feelings of alienation and inadequacy. Sturgeon’s work at novel length is memorable for its portrayals of characters who rise above the isolation their failure to fit into normal society imposes. More Than Human tells of a group of psychologically dysfunctional individuals who pool their individual strengths to create a superhuman gestalt consciousness. In The Dreaming Jewels, a young boy discovers that his behavioral abnormalities are actually the symptoms of super- human powers. Sturgeon is also renowned for his explorations of taboo sexuality and restrictive moralities in such stories as Some of Your Blood, “The World Well Lost,” and “If All Men Were Brothers Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?” His short fiction has been collected in Without Sorcery, E Pluribus Unicorn, Caviar, and A Touch of Strange. The compilations The Ultimate Egoist, Thunder and Roses, A Saucer of Lone- liness, The Perfect Host, Baby Is Three, The Microcosmic God, and Killdozer, edited by Paul Williams, are the first seven volumes in a series that will eventually reprint all of Sturgeon’s short fiction.

Traveling into the past only to discover that the past isn’t there any more is a popular conceit of the genre. “Yesterday Was Monday,” one of his most-often reprinted tales, is one of the early time-travel stories that were published after the pulp era, where the emphasis wasn’t on science yet so much as strangeness, evoking a surreal feeling that this story embodies perfectly. Making the protagonist of the story an everyday person waking up in his own past instead of a scientist or an inventor only adds to the unusual blend of time travel and fantasy.

Yesterday Was Monday

Theodore Sturgeon

HARRY WRIGHT ROLLED over and said something spelled “Bzzzzhha-a-aw!” He chewed a bit on a mouthful of dry air and spat it out, opened one eye to see if it really would open, opened the other and closed the first, closed the second, swung his feet onto the floor, opened them again and stretched. This was a daily occurrence, and the only thing that made it remarkable at all was that he did it on a Wednesday morning, and—

Yesterday was Monday.

Oh, he knew it was Wednesday all right. It was partly that, even though he knew yesterday was Monday, there was a gap between Monday and now; and that must have been Tuesday. When you fall asleep and lie there all night without dreaming, you know, when you wake up, that time has passed. You’ve done nothing that you can remember; you’ve had no particular thoughts, no way to gauge time, and yet you know that some hours have passed. So it was with Harry Wright. Tuesday had gone wherever your eight hours went last night.

But he hadn’t slept through Tuesday. Oh no. He never slept, as a matter of fact, more than six hours at a stretch, and there was no particular reason for him doing so now. Monday was the day before yesterday; he

had turned in and slept his usual stretch, he had awakened, and it was Wednesday.

It felt like Wednesday. There was a Wednesdayish feel to the air.

Harry put on his socks and stood up. He wasn't fooled. He knew what day it was. "What happened to yesterday?" he muttered. "Oh—yesterday was Monday." That sufficed until he got his pajamas off. "Monday," he mused, reaching for his underwear, "was quite a while back, seems as though." If he had been the worrying type, he would have started then and there. But he wasn't. He was an easygoing sort, the kind of man that gets himself into a rut and stays there until he is pushed out. That was why he was an automobile mechanic at twenty-three dollars a week; that's why he had been one for eight years now, and would be from now on, if he could only find Tuesday and get back to work.

Guided by his reflexes, as usual, and with no mental effort at all, which was also usual, he finished washing, dressing, and making his bed. His alarm clock, which never alarmed because he was of such regular habits, said, as usual, six twenty-two when he paused on the way out, and gave his room the once-over. And there was a certain something about the place that made even this phlegmatic character stop and think.

It wasn't finished.

The bed was there, and the picture of Joe Louis. There were the two chairs sharing their usual seven legs, the split table, the pipe-organ bedstead, the beige wallpaper with the two swans over and over and over, the tiny corner sink, the tilted bureau. But none of them were finished. Not that there were any holes in anything. What paint there had been in the first place was still there. But there was an odor of old cut lumber, a subtle, insistent air of building, about the room and everything in it. It was indefinable, inescapable, and Harry Wright stood there caught up in it, wondering. He glanced suspiciously around but saw nothing he could really be suspicious of. He shook his head, locked the door and went out into the hall.

On the steps a little fellow, just over three feet tall, was gently stroking the third step from the top with a razor-sharp chisel, shaping up a new scar in the dirty wood. He looked up as Harry approached, and stood up quickly.

"Hi," said Harry, taking in the man's leather coat, his peaked cap, his wizened, bright-eyed little face. "Whatcha doing?"

"Touch-up," piped the little man. "The actor in the third floor front has a nail in his right heel. He came in late Tuesday night and cut the wood here. I have to get it ready for Wednesday."

"This is Wednesday," Harry pointed out.

"Of course. Always has been. Always will be."

Harry let that pass, started on down the stairs. He had achieved his amazing bovinity by making a practice of ignoring things he could not understand. But one thing bothered him—

"Did you say that feller in the third floor front was an actor?"

"Yes. They're all actors, you know."

"You're nuts, friend," said Harry bluntly. "That guy works on the docks."

“Oh yes—that’s his part. That’s what he acts.”

“No kiddin’. An’ what does he do when he isn’t acting?”

“But he—Well, that’s all he does do! That’s all any of the actors do!”

“Gee— I thought he looked like a reg’lar guy, too,” said Harry. “An actor? ’Magine!”

“Excuse me,” said the little man, “but I’ve got to get back to work. We mustn’t let anything get by us, you know. They’ll be through Tuesday before long, and everything must be ready for them.”

Harry thought: this guy’s crazy nuts. He smiled uncertainly and went down to the landing below. When he looked back the man was cutting skillfully into the stair, making a neat little nail scratch. Harry shook his head. This was a screwy morning. He’d be glad to get back to the shop. There was a ’39 sedan down there with a busted rear spring. Once he got his mind on that he could forget this nonsense. That’s all that matters to a man in a rut. Work, eat, sleep, pay day. Why even try to think anything else out?

The street was a riot of activity, but then it always was. But not quite this way. There were automobiles and trucks and buses around, aplenty, but none of them were moving. And none of them were quite complete. This was Harry’s own field; if there was anything he didn’t know about motor vehicles, it wasn’t very important. And through that medium he began to get the general idea of what was going on.

Swarms of little men who might have been twins of the one he had spoken to were crowding around the cars, the sidewalks, the stores and buildings. All were working like mad with every tool imaginable. Some were touching up the finish of the cars with fine wire brushes, laying on networks of microscopic cracks and scratches. Some, with ball peens and mallets, were denting fenders skillfully, bending bumpers in an artful crash pattern, spider-webbing safety-glass windshields. Others were aging top dressing with high-pressure, needlepoint sandblasters. Still others were pumping dust into upholstery, sandpapering the dashboard finish around light switches, throttles, chokes, to give a finger-worn appearance. Harry stood aside as a half dozen of the workers scampered down the street bearing a fender which they riveted to a 1930 coupé. It was freshly bloodstained.

Once awakened to this highly unusual activity, Harry stopped, slightly open-mouthed, to watch what else was going on. He saw the same process being industriously accomplished with the houses and stores. Dirt was being laid on plate-glass windows over a coat of clear sizing. Woodwork was being cleverly scored and the paint peeled to make it look correctly weather-beaten, and dozens of leather-clad laborers were on their hands and knees, poking dust and dirt into the cracks between the paving blocks. A line of them went down the sidewalk, busily chewing gum and spitting it out; they were followed by another crew who carefully placed the wads according to diagrams they carried, and stamped them flat.

Harry set his teeth and muscled his rocking brain into something like its normal position. “I ain’t never seen a day like this or crazy people like this,” he said, “but I ain’t gonna let it be any of my affair. I got my job to go to.” And trying vainly to ignore the hundreds of little, hard-working figures, he went grimly on down the street.

When he got to the garage he found no one there but more swarms of stereotyped little people climbing over the place, dulling the paint work, cracking the cement flooring, doing their hurried, efficient little tasks of aging. He noticed, only because he was so familiar with the garage, that they were actually making the marks that had been there as long as he had known the place. “Hell with it,” he gritted, anxious to submerge himself

into his own world of wrenches and grease guns. “I got my job; this is none o’ my affair.”

He looked about him, wondering if he should clean these interlopers out of the garage. Naw—not his affair, He was hired to repair cars, not to police the joint. Long as they kept away from him—and, of course, animal caution told him that he was far, far outnumbered. The absence of the boss and the other mechanics was no surprise to Harry; he always opened the place.

He climbed out of his street clothes and into coveralls, picked up a tool case and walked over to the sedan, which he had left up on the hydraulic rack yester— that is, Monday night. And that is when Harry Wright lost his temper. After all, the car was his job, and he didn’t like having anyone else mess with a job he had started. So when he saw his job—his ’39 sedan—resting steadily on its wheels over the rack, which was down under the floor, and when he saw that the rear spring was repaired, he began to burn. He dived under the car and ran deft fingers over the rear wheel suspensions. In spite of his anger at this unprecedented occurrence, he had to admit to himself that the job had been done well. “Might have done it myself,” he muttered.

A soft clank and a gentle movement caught his attention. With a roar he reached out and grabbed the leg of one of the ubiquitous little men, wriggled out from under the car, caught his culprit by his leather collar, and dangled him at arm’s length.

“What are you doing to my job?” Harry bellowed.

The little man tucked his chin into the front of his shirt to give his windpipe a chance, and said, “Why, I was just finishing up that spring job.”

“Oh. So you were just finishing up on that spring job,” Harry whispered, choked with rage. Then, at the top of his voice, “Who told you to touch that car?”

“Who told me? What do you— Well, it just had to be done, that’s all. You’ll have to let me go. I must tighten up those two bolts and lay some dust on the whole thing.”

“You must what? You get within six feet o’ that car and I’ll twist your head offn your neck with a Stillson!”

“But— It has to be done!”

“You won’t do it! Why, I oughta—”

“Please let me go! If I don’t leave that car the way it was Tuesday night—”

“When was Tuesday night?”

“The last act, of course. Let me go, or I’ll call the district supervisor!”

“Call the devil himself. I’m going to spread you on the sidewalk outside; and heaven help you if I catch you near here again!”

The little man’s jaw set, his eyes narrowed, and he whipped his feet upward. They crashed into Wright’s jaw; Harry dropped him and staggered back. The little man began squealing, “Supervisor! Supervisor! Emergency!”

Harry growled and started after him; but suddenly, in the air between him and the midget workman, a long white hand appeared. The empty air was swept back, showing an aperture from the garage to blank, blind nothingness. Out of it stepped a tall man in a single loose-fitting garment literally studded with pockets. The opening closed behind the man.

Harry cowered before him. Never in his life had he seen such noble, powerful features, such strength of purpose, such broad shoulders, such a deep chest. The man stood with the backs of his hands on his hips, staring at Harry as if he were something somebody forgot to sweep up.

“That’s him,” said the little man shrilly. “He is trying to stop me from doing the work!”

“Who are you?” asked the beautiful man, down his nose.

“I’m the m-mechanic on this j-j— Who wants to know?”

“Iridel, supervisor of the district of Futura, wants to know.”

“Where in hell did you come from?”

“I did not come from hell. I came from Thursday.”

Harry held his head. “What is all this?” he wailed. “Why is today Wednesday? Who are all these crazy little guys? What happened to Tuesday?”

Iridel made a slight motion with his finger, and the little man scurried back under the car. Harry was frenzied to hear the wrench busily tightening bolts. He half started to dive under after the little fellow, but Iridel said, “Stop!” and when Iridel said, “Stop!” Harry stopped.

“This,” said Iridel calmly, “is an amazing occurrence.” He regarded Harry with unemotional curiosity. “An actor on stage before the sets are finished. Extraordinary.”

“What stage?” asked Harry. “What are you doing here anyhow, and what’s the idea of all these little guys working around here?”

“You ask a great many questions, actor,” said Iridel. “I shall answer them, and then I shall have a few to ask you. These little men are stage hands— I am surprised that you didn’t realize that. They are setting the stage for Wednesday. Tuesday? That’s going on now.”

“Arrgh!” Harry snorted. “How can Tuesday be going on when today’s Wednesday?”

“Today isn’t Wednesday, actor.”

“Huh?”

“Today is Tuesday.”

Harry scratched his head. “Met a feller on the steps this mornin’—one of these here stage hands of yours. He said this was Wednesday.”

“It is Wednesday. Today is Tuesday. Tuesday is today. ‘Today’ is simply the name for the stage set which happens to be in use. ‘Yesterday’ means the set that has just been used; ‘Tomorrow’ is the set that will be used after the actors have finished with ‘today.’ This is Wednesday. Yesterday was Monday; today is Tuesday. See?”

Harry said, “No.”

Iridel threw up his long hands. “My, you actors are stupid. Now listen carefully. This is Act Wednesday, Scene 6:22. That means that everything you see around you here is being readied for 6:22 a.m. on Wednesday. Wednesday isn’t a time; it’s a place. The actors are moving along toward it now. I see you still don’t get the idea. Let’s see . . . ah. Look at that clock. What does it say?”

Harry Wright looked at the big electric clock on the wall over the compressor. It was corrected hourly and highly accurate, and it said 6:22. Harry looked at it amazed. “Six tw— but my gosh, man, that’s what time I left the house. I walked here, an’ I been here ten minutes already!”

Iridel shook his head. “You’ve been here no time at all, because there is no time until the actors make their entrances.”

Harry sat down on a grease drum and wrinkled up his brains with the effort he was making. “You mean that this time proposition ain’t something that moves along all the time? Sorta—well, like a road. A road don’t go no place— You just go places along it. Is that it?”

“That’s the general idea. In fact, that’s a pretty good example. Suppose we say that it’s a road; a highway built of paving blocks. Each block is a day; the actors move along it, and go through day after day. And our job here—mine and the little men—is to . . . well, pave that road. This is the clean-up gang here. They are fixing up the last little details, so that everything will be ready for the actors.”

Harry sat still, his mind creaking with the effects of this information. He felt as if he had been hit with a lead pipe, and the shock of it was being drawn out infinitely. This was the craziest-sounding thing he had ever run into. For no reason at all he remembered a talk he had had once with a drunken aviation mechanic who had tried to explain to him how the air flowing over an airplane’s wings makes the machine go up in the air. He hadn’t understood a word of the man’s discourse, which was all about eddies and chords and cambers and foils, dihedrals and the Bernoulli effect. That didn’t make any difference; the things flew whether he understood how or not; he knew that because he had seen them. This guy Iridel’s lecture was the same sort of thing. If there was nothing in all he said, how come all these little guys were working around here? Why wasn’t the clock telling time? Where was Tuesday?

He thought he’d get that straight for good and all. “Just where is Tuesday?” he asked.

“Over there,” said Iridel, and pointed. Harry recoiled and fell off the drum; for when the man extended his hand, it disappeared!

Harry got up off the floor and said tautly, “Do that again.”

“What? Oh— Point toward Tuesday? Certainly.” And he pointed. His hand appeared again when he withdrew it.

Harry said, “My gosh!” and sat down again on the drum, sweating and staring at the supervisor of the district

of Futura. “You point, an’ your hand—ain’t,” he breathed. “What direction is that?”

“It is a direction like any other direction,” said Iridel. “You know yourself there are four directions—forward, sideward, upward, and”—he pointed again, and again his hand vanished—“that way!”

“They never tole me that in school,” said Harry. “Course, I was just a kid then, but—”

Iridel laughed. “It is the fourth dimension—it is duration. The actors move through length, breadth, and height, anywhere they choose to within the set. But there is another movement—one they can’t control—and that is duration.”

“How soon will they come . . . eh . . . here?” asked Harry, waving an arm. Iridel dipped into one of his numberless pockets and pulled out a watch. “lt is now eight thirty-seven Tuesday morning,” he said. “They’ll be here as soon as they finish the act, and the scenes in Wednesday that have already been prepared.”

Harry thought again for a moment, while Iridel waited patiently, smiling a little. Then he looked up at the supervisor and asked, “Hey—this ‘actor’ business—what’s that all about?”

“Oh—that. Well, it’s a play, that’s all. Just like any play—put on for the amusement of an audience.”

“I was to a play once,” said Harry. “Who’s the audience?”

Iridel stopped smiling. “Certain— Ones who may be amused,” he said. “And now I’m going to ask you some questions. How did you get here?”

“Walked.”

“You walked from Monday night to Wednesday morning?”

“Naw— From the house to here.”

“Ah— But how did you get to Wednesday, six twenty-two?”

“Well I— Damfino. I just woke up an’ came to work as usual.”

“This is an extraordinary occurrence,” said Iridel, shaking his head in puzzlement. “You’ll have to see the producer.”

“Producer? Who’s he?”

“You’ll find out. In the meantime, come along with me. I can’t leave you here; you’re too close to the play. I have to make my rounds anyway.”

Iridel walked toward the door. Harry was tempted to stay and find himself some more work to do, but when Iridel glanced back at him and motioned him out, Harry followed. It was suddenly impossible to do anything else.

Just as he caught up with the supervisor, a little worker ran up, whipping off his cap.

“Iridel, sir,” he piped, “the weather makers put .006 of one percent too little moisture in the air on this set. There’s three sevenths of an ounce too little gasoline in the storage tanks under here.”

“How much is in the tanks?”

“Four thousand two hundred and seventy-three gallons, three pints, seven and twenty-one thirty-fourths ounces.”

Iridel grunted. “Let it go this time. That was very sloppy work. Someone’s going to get transferred to Limbo for this.”

“Very good, sir,” said the little man. “Long as you know we’re not responsible.” He put on his cap, spun around three times and rushed off.

“Lucky for the weather makers that the amount of gas in that tank doesn’t come into Wednesday’s script,” said Iridel. “If anything interferes with the continuity of the play, there’s the devil to pay. Actors haven’t sense enough to cover up, either. They are liable to start whole series of miscues because of a little thing like that. The play might flop and then we’d all be out of work.”

“Oh,” Harry oh-ed. “Hey, Iridel—what’s the idea of that patchy- looking place over there?”

Iridel followed his eyes. Harry was looking at a corner lot. It was tree-lined and overgrown with weeds and small saplings. The vegetation was true to form around the edges of the lot, and around the path that ran diagonally through it; but the spaces in between were a plain surface. Not a leaf nor a blade of grass grew there; it was naked-looking, blank, and absolutely without any color whatever.

“Oh, that,” answered Iridel. “There are only two characters in Act Wednesday who will use that path. Therefore it is as grown-over as it should be. The rest of the lot doesn’t enter into the play, so we don’t have to do anything with it.”

“But— Suppose someone wandered off the path on Wednesday,” Harry offered.

“He’d be due for a surprise, I guess. But it could hardly happen. Special prompters are always detailed to spots like that, to keep the actors from going astray or missing any cues.”

“Who are they—the prompters, I mean?”

“Prompters? G.A.’s—Guardian Angels. That’s what the script writers call them.”

“I heard o’ them,” said Harry.

“Yes, they have their work cut out for them,” said the supervisor. “Actors are always forgetting their lines when they shouldn’t, or remembering them when the script calls for a lapse. Well, it looks pretty good here. Let’s have a look at Friday.”

“Friday? You mean to tell me you’re working on Friday already?”

“Of course! Why, we work years in advance! How on earth do you think we could get our trees grown otherwise? Here—step in!” Iridel put out his hand, seized empty air, drew it aside to show the kind of

absolute nothingness he had first appeared from, and waved Harry on.

“Y-you want me to go in there?” asked Harry diffidently.

“Certainly. Hurry, now!”

Harry looked at the section of void with a rather weak-kneed look, but could not withstand the supervisor’s strange compulsion. He stepped through.

And it wasn’t so bad. There were no whirling lights, no sensations of falling, no falling unconscious. It was just like stepping into another room—which is what had happened. He found himself in a great round chamber, whose roundness was touched a bit with the indistinct. That is, it had curved walls and a domed roof, but there was something else about it. It seemed to stretch off in that direction toward which Iridel had so astonishingly pointed. The walls were lined with an amazing array of control machinery—switches and ground-glass screens, indicators and dials, knurled knobs, and levers. Moving deftly before them was a crew of men, each looking exactly like Iridel except that their garments had no pockets. Harry stood wide-eyed, hypnotized by the enormous complexity of the controls and the ease with which the men worked among them. Iridel touched his shoulder. “Come with me,” he said. “The producer is in now; we’ll find out what is to be done with you.”

They started across the floor. Harry had not quite time to wonder how long it would take them to cross that enormous room, for when they had taken perhaps a dozen steps they found themselves at the opposite wall. The ordinary laws of space and time simply did not apply in the place.

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