

Re Case 11

To: Bishop & Smedley, Solicitors

From: David Enstrum, Private Investigator

Dear Sirs,

You may have received an interim report on case 11 from me several weeks ago. On the other hand, given subsequent events, you probably did not. In the circumstances, whatever they are, I must treat this letter as my first communication on the subject although I am sure that it is not. Once you have read it you will understand my apparent confusion.

I enclose my formal report on this case. As with the previous ten cases which you have referred to me, I must report substantial discrepancies between my findings and your background information. However, the unusual circumstances of this case force me to provide other information which, you will soon understand, can form no part of my report.

As requested on previous occasions, I carried out a full investigation to verify the accuracy of the background information and provide additional facts. Unlike previous occasions, despite statements to the contrary in my present report, I was able to confirm the basic facts provided. Marcus Abrahams was indeed involved in a serious car crash which killed his wife and two children. I obtained newspaper articles and police records covering the crash. I included copies of these with the interim report which I think I sent to you. Not surprisingly Marcus's life deteriorated seriously following the crash. He had had a promising career in environmental research, tackling the growing problems arising from global warming, but the loss of his family destroyed his motivation. This was all covered in detail in my interim report, as I remember it. I might have concluded my investigation at that point, but this was the first occasion when I had made any progress whatsoever on one of your client's cases. Previously I investigated, amongst others, a suicide which had never happened, a building which had not collapsed, a person who had not been murdered and even someone who appeared never to have existed. This case had no such inconsistencies and paradoxically this prompted me to continue the investigation. At this stage I think I sent you my interim report.

I decided to make direct contact with the subject. This was not difficult. Marcus made regular visits to a bar where he could safely hide from the world in the isolation of a crowded room. It is a strange fact that a person of one disposition will seek a crowded place to increase their contact with mankind while another will use the same place to isolate themselves from it. The latter will usually protect themselves from intrusion by their demeanour, but I had a purpose and was sure that Marcus would respond eventually. So it was that I befriended him and sowed the seeds of my current confusion.

After a number of encounters in the bar Marcus eventually invited me to his home which, of course, I had already seen in my previous investigation of him. His house reflected his life. A neglected garden was a sad welcome mat before a door with peeling paint which suggested further gloom beyond it. The revelation on its opening was no surprise. The smell of indeterminate decay hung around dusty furniture against fading painted walls. It seemed that Marcus regarded ventilation as too great an intrusion by the outside world and had banned it from his home. I settled in a leather chair, which appeared to have reverted to the corpse of the animal from which it was originally fashioned, and helped him consume the bottle of indifferent whisky which he produced. Despite its quality, I should have been grateful for the effects of the alcohol, which was maybe the only identifiable ingredient, considering what then happened.

Marcus had been relating the story of his family's demise, while I paid little attention as I already knew it in detail, when he seemed to suffer a strange spasm. My doubts about the whisky increased, especially when the whole room began to swim before my eyes. I thought that the glare in them was an early symptom of the other less conventional ingredients of the previously comforting liquid, but rapidly realised that it was no illusion. The room was actually brighter. My vision cleared and I tried to understand what had happened, but failed dismally. The bovine corpse beneath me had gone. In its place was something upholstered in clean fabric, maybe synthetic but definitely not associated with death. The glare was caused by the light pastel paintwork on the walls. It was nothing like the sombre accretion that I had seen earlier. I looked for the empty bottle on the table. This drink was apparently the ultimate elixir, changing one's outlook on life so much that it should be served in those rose-tinted glasses that come in for so much criticism. However, the bottle was gone. Even the table looked somehow different. A pair of modest sherry glasses on it seemed consistent with the fact that I was no longer feeling seriously intoxicated. I hurriedly scanned my recovering eyes around the room. It was the same shape as I recollected but little else was familiar and above all it smelt fresh, young, alive. Where was I?

Marcus appeared to be recovering from his spasms. Whatever had happened had affected him more than myself. Like myself he was confused but also excited and even apparently happy. I could not understand the rapid change in his demeanour, but I discovered that I had much more than that to understand when his wife drove up the drive with the children she had just collected from school. He seemed to be completely at home with the situation and apparently understood my predicament as he produced another bottle of whisky with a much more reputable label from a drinks cabinet I had not previously noticed to alleviate my distress.

Over the following days I obtained something resembling an explanation from Marcus. Indeed, apart from his story and my own recollection of the experience, the more I consider the current situation the less I believe that anything unusual happened. Although I recollect sending you a report on Marcus's sad life I can find nothing of it in my own files. I have also been unable to trace any of the newspaper articles or other evidence of the crash, which clearly did not kill his family as they are alive and well. Hence my doubts that you received my original report. Under the circumstances I started the investigation again and discovered that your background information is unfounded, as with all the other cases. Marcus is a happily married man who has made substantial contributions in his field of research, which I admit to not understanding, and his career is apparently blooming, as are the flowers in his garden. Nevertheless we share memories of something else which cannot be denied, although our recollections of the details are dimming rapidly. The following part of our story is entirely hearsay from Marcus, but then the entire contents of this letter are now no more meaningful than that.

On the day concerned Marcus remembers inviting me home and offering me a drink, although the precise circumstances of our meeting seem to elude him. He remembers having some sort of fit after which he woke up in what he thought was a hospital room. The staff were initially quite reticent to explain the situation. Indeed, they asked as many questions as he did, such as whether he knew what the date was and his own name. He assumed that they were testing his mental faculties when they also asked questions about world affairs which were easily answered. Later he realised how wrong he was. Once they were satisfied that he was physically and mentally sound he was allowed to leave his room and walk around the premises, to some degree. He discovered that there were many locked doors, no apparent way of leaving the building and no external windows. He wondered whether he had had a breakdown and was in a closed mental facility, but there were also apparently no other patients. In fact the more he explored the more he suspected that this was not a hospital but a scientific establishment. Through internal windows he saw offices and laboratories containing unidentifiable equipment but nothing to establish his whereabouts.

Eventually a concerned young lady in a white coat found him and took him to an office where he met a middle-aged man who simply introduced himself as John. He offered no title nor did anything in the room explain his status. There followed more extensive questions about current affairs which seemed to go far beyond any reasonable test of mental competence. Also some of John's questions seemed incongruous and not based on reality. Marcus suspected that John was using these to test him further. Apart from the general questions, John seemed very interested in Marcus's personal life. Gradually Marcus realised that the man questioning him was not testing him but honestly seemed not to know about his life-shattering misfortune. Either that or this man was a remarkably good psychologist. He had no way of knowing for sure either way. It was only when Marcus completely lost his temper that John apologised profusely and decided to end the session, suggesting that Marcus return to his room to relax.

On his return to the room Marcus discovered that a selection of food and drink had been left there in his absence. He noticed that there was also a rather old-fashioned looking television, which he tried using, but the programmes all appeared to be equally dated recordings of no great interest. There were also some books in a bookcase, but he did not relish the idea that he would be in this place long enough to read any of them, so he simply settled on the bed to rest. Exhausted by the whole strange experience he slept for a considerable time.

Later, it may have been another day but he had no way of knowing as time did not seem to be a prominent feature in this place, he woke to a knock on the door. It was John himself who entered and invited Marcus to go with him to meet another member of "the team" who would explain things. At least now Marcus knew that there was a team with some purpose which he would hopefully discover. They went to another bland office where the new man introduced himself as just Adrian. Still no rank or serial number. Marcus was rapidly tiring of this sterile world and missed the familiar secluded comfort of his slowly rotting home, despite its memories.

On this occasion the situation had changed. Now, unlike John, Adrian was ready to provide information, but nothing like any of the simple explanations that had occurred to Marcus. Instead he embarked on a long presentation of scientific theories which seemed to have nothing to do with Marcus's present need for answers. Any interjection by Marcus was simply met with a request to have patience and try to understand. At this point I must tell you that it is beyond me to tell you exactly what Marcus told me about Adrian's explanation of whatever was going on. The best I can do is explain in my own words the little that filtered through this imperfect chain of human communication. Just like Marcus you may take a while to see the connection.

My subject for today is time travel, itself a time-honoured subject of much science fiction and serious scientific conjecture. There have always been strong objections to the concept. The favourite is the paradox where a person travels back in time and kills their own parents. On the other hand travel forward in time is boring. We all do it at a steady pace anyway. Also there is a strong belief that timelines are irredeemably divergent. Go back to the past and change it and you will return to a different future, if you can return at all, because your original timeline has been disconnected from your new present. Factor in the butterfly effect and there will be no recognisable future to return to. In fact it seems that there could be as many timelines in the universe as there are elementary particles at some quantum level. Already I feel that I am not the best person to explain this. However, just suppose that somewhere along the line we have got this slightly wrong. Perhaps it is only necessary that the past, present and future are connected logically without any serious knots or snags and the universe will make do with just one set of them. Certainly that appears to be mankind's perception of reality, so why not stick with it. I don't know whether any of this helps you, but it helps me to try to explain the next bit.

Most impressions of time travel probably stem from H. G. Wells's story of the man who makes a machine to transport himself through time. Immediately the paradox problem looms. A man may travel to any time and do anything, thus possibly destroying everything he knows including his own existence. However, if the process is reversed the paradox may be avoided. If the machine cannot transport the maker back in time, but can apparently transport another person from the future into the present, then things may be different. But for my recent experience I would consider this all to be nonsense, but nevertheless it is the gist of what Adrian told Marcus.

It would seem that there was an organisation working in the past on such a project and maybe there still is. The machine was apparently built and they had some success with it. Marcus gained the impression that they had no way of selecting the subjects of their experiments. This is why John knew nothing about Marcus, his personal life, the current affairs of the day or even the date of his abduction from our time. Unlike Wells's time traveller, they had no dials to set the target. The machine, when it worked at all, appeared to select its own subject by some whim. There was nevertheless a common feature of the subjects successfully transported. In each case there were actions that the operators of the machine could take in their own time for the benefit of the subject, mankind in general or their own organisation, based on the information which the subject provided. There is no paradox in someone taking action in the present to affect the future and Adrian was very vague about whether any physical transportation of a subject was even actually involved or whether it was just some mental illusion which Marcus experienced. In principle even the transfer of information from the future to the present could create a paradox, but information still needs a person to take action to change anything and people are notoriously unpredictable creatures. Also maybe the machine itself was unable to access any subject whose knowledge could create such a paradox. Perhaps there are knots and snags in our timeline which need straightening out and this machine provided a means for nature to take a better course. Some people might see a divine hand at work here. I just see another headache coming.

After the big explanation Adrian warned Marcus that things might be different when he returned to our time. He did not explain how or when this would happen and Marcus was allowed to return to his room to consider everything that he had been told. Nobody offered to show him the fabulous machine and he wondered how much truth there was in the tale. After another meal he again fell asleep and found himself dreaming of his lost family. He was reliving the happy times spent with them before the crash although, like all dreams, the facts were strangely distorted. The dream persisted and evolved into a fantasy where he witnessed his children growing older than he had ever had the opportunity of knowing them. Unknown holidays, Christmases and birthdays crowded into his mind, faster and faster, blurring into a mass of consistent information which we would normally describe as memories.

Marcus awoke to find himself in his familiar home with me sitting beside him. Yes, it was a familiar home. Everything was just as he remembered it. Adrian's warning had apparently been unnecessary. He looked at the clock on the wall. His wife would be home with the children soon. His wife would be home with the children soon. His wife would be home with the children soon. Why did that thought seem so alien? If you write the same word over and over again you can eventually convince yourself that you have spelt it wrongly. So it was with this thought. Then he remembered the car crash, or rather a car crash. Slowly he realised that behind all the happy memories of his family life there were darker memories, rapidly fading. Perhaps Adrian had been right. He remembered recounting these alien memories to the man sitting next to him, who seemed extremely confused. He stood up and headed for the drinks cabinet.

We have come to the conclusion that Adrian, John and “the team” did something to change their future and Marcus’s past. How I got involved remains a mystery to us. We could understand one person ending up with apparently false memories which they would rapidly put out of their mind, but in this case we were able to agree on many of our recollections of Marcus’s other life. Nevertheless there is now no tangible evidence of our experience and therefore I assume that, if time has been thorough in all other respects, you never received my previous report which is now just a work of fiction in my head. Marcus still has trouble remembering how our friendship started and I have of course not told him of my professional activities on your client’s behalf.

Obviously the organisation involved would have benefited substantially from information gleaned from the future. Although the future is clearly very fluid, they must have acquired general pointers to assist them in investing a little more wisely than the average company, so they probably did not encounter any funding problems in the long term. Also it seems possible that their technology may have been developed with some lucky assistance from our own future. I also wonder how much of a natural process was involved in the creation of the project at its inception, whenever that was in whichever version of time. The difficult thing to grasp is their motivation. It would be many years before they had any inkling of the effects of their activities. Presumably in the long term they would need to employ someone like myself to investigate past, or is that present or future, cases. I am now beginning to understand exactly what I may be doing pursuing these endless non-events on your client’s behalf. Only someone closely involved in the project would have access to the non-facts which you have repeatedly supplied to me.

As a matter of personal integrity I may occasionally feel obliged to investigate my own clients. However I do not intend to waste my time looking for a financially successful organisation with interests in certain scientific subjects. Instead I would ask you to pass on three requests to your clients.

First, although I can present no evidence apart from the contents of this letter for the duplication of my efforts, I intend to send you an invoice for both of my investigations into case 11. I trust that your clients will see fit to honour it.

Second, I am quite prepared to continue investigating your client’s cases, provided that the background information is a little more forthcoming on what I might expect to encounter. I owe that much to my liver.

Third, I am still seriously concerned that I was so personally involved in this last case and that time appears to have left unfinished business. If this organisation has the benefit of foresight in the choices that it makes, then please ask your client to answer this question which is nagging me.

Is there a case file on me?

Yours faithfully,
David Enstrum