

RETROCAUSALITY

By
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FADE IN:

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA - BABYLON (2250 B.C.) - NIGHT

SUPER: Babylon - 2250 B.C.

Soft moonlight shines on narrow, dusty, and deserted streets winding among mud-brick buildings. Scattered torches flicker in time with the WHISPER of a gentle wind as insects BUZZ.

At tree-top level, there is a SPARK as a flat-black, rugby ball-sized PROBE appears in mid-air, indistinct and nearly invisible. After a moment, it glides away silently.

EXT. ISHTAR GATE - CONTINUOUS

The probe hovers, bobbing ever so slightly in the breeze.

PROBE POV - THE GATE

In night vision green. Lines of laser light rapidly criss-cross the gate from one end to the other.

BACK TO SCENE

No visible lights as the probe glides over the gate and stops on the other side.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - WAREHOUSE (PRESENT) - DAY

SUPER: Present

Huge interior space with old, dusty equipment in the corners. Bright lights shine on a large, metal ring lying in the center. A thick cable extends from it to a shipping container-sized metal box with a large digital control panel.

On a raised platform with a railing, stereotypical SCIENTISTS in lab coats cluster around large window pane-thin monitors. SIMON JACOBS (30), thin and geeky, works at a console.

MARTIN GALANG (50), gray-haired and tall in a designer suit, strides up to the console. The scientists part like schooled fish fleeing a predator.

GALANG

Well?

JACOBS

Under a minute left.

Galang scowls and rocks back-and-forth on his feet, his hands flutter in impatience.

In the center of the ring, a tractor tire-sized distortion appears in the air just above the floor. The probe glides out of the distortion and into the facility as the distortion vanishes.

The scientists erupt in cheers and clapping. Galang smiles slightly and looks around at the celebrating scientists.

GALANG

Great work, ladies and gentlemen.
The first time travel trial run is a
success.

Jacobs taps on a keyboard as the probe settles onto a form-fitting cradle.

JACOBS

We're getting data! Whoa. Check
this out.

A detailed black-and-white image of the Ishtar Gate appears on a screen. There is a collective intake of breath. Scientist BRENT MABRY (50), bald and pudgy, leans closer.

MABRY

It's different from the
reconstructions. Imagine what it's
like in full color.

JACOBS

The probe's lasers act like radar,
so true color isn't in the cards.

MABRY

(to Galang)
Can we do it in daylight?

GALANG

No. We don't have time for joyrides.
Gather around everybody.

The scientists cautiously huddle around.

GALANG (CONT'D)

The test run was successful, so we
are a go for an actual mission.

Galang hands Jacobs a flash drive, who inserts it in a port. Everybody waits impatiently as Jacobs accesses the files.

INSERT SCREEN

Futuristic windows-style interface with virtual file folders.

JACOBS (O.S.)
What am I looking for?

A hand points at one.

GALANG (O.S.)
That's it.

CLICK and a satellite image of terrain with a river appears. A circular, transparent red overlay covers an area. To one side, mathematical data scrolls up the screen.

BACK TO SCENE

Jacobs wrinkles his brow.

JACOBS
Ikh... Khorig, Mongolia?

GALANG
Yes. A spy satellite crossing over China detected a radiological... anomaly.

Mabry looks closer at the screen.

MABRY
Gamma radiation... a nuclear reaction. The Chinese set off a nuke in Mongolia? Their test site is Lop Nor. That's over a thousand miles away.

GALANG
Not possible since it happened in the early thirteenth century.

The scientist look at each other in shock.

MABRY
How do you know that?

GALANG
Time sensing.

JACOBS
I thought that was an urban legend. Is there really a machine that can look back in time?

GALANG
Oh, yes. It's very accurate, too. It pinpointed the event to a specific day in August 1227, plus or minus an hour. It's in the file.

Mabry speed reads the data for a moment, then points to the metal box in the center of the facility.

MABRY

Those kinds of readings come from something like that fusion reactor going through a melt down.

GALANG

So it would seem. Jacobs, get the portal set up again with those chrono-spatial coordinates. And get me live feed. I need to see it as it happens, not an instant replay. I'll be back after I make a call.

The scientists relax slightly as Galang exits.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - WAREHOUSE - LATER

Mabry hovers over Jacobs, who types frantically. In the b.g., other scientists check the equipment and reactor.

MABRY

Can you do it?

Jacobs waves dismissively.

JACOBS

Shut up. I'm working on it.

Mabry visibly sweats.

MABRY

He's going to be here any minute.

JACOBS

I know!

Jacob's twitches and grimaces as he types until he finishes.

JACOBS (CONT'D)

Got it. We can keep the door open and get real-time video feed if we overclock the reactor.

MABRY

Overclock? This isn't a home computer we're talking about... How much?

JACOBS

(low)

A hundred and twelve percent.

MABRY

What?! You trying to fry us all?

JACOBS

We're good... as long as the coolant flows. If it starts to overclock too much...

MABRY

(overlapping)

You mean "melt down."

Jacobs spins his chair towards Mabry.

JACOBS

Semantics.

Mabry jerks slightly.

MABRY

(muttering)

He's back.

Galang walks up, the other scientists in tow. Jacobs turns back to the screen, then his eyes widen.

GALANG

The SECDEF just chewed my ass, so you'd better have some good news.

Jacobs looks at Galang in alarm.

JACOBS

This calls for a run during broad daylight. Whatever we do can affect our timeline.

GALANG

(overlapping)

A calculated risk. We need to see what caused the event just before it occurred. Since it happened in the daytime, that's when we go back.

EXT. MONGOLIA - IKH KHORIG (1227) - DAY

SUPER: Ikh Khorig, Mongolia - August, 1227.

Rolling grasslands under a cloud spotted August sky. In the distance, numerous short Mongolian horses graze. An eagle turns lazy circles overhead.

A distortion appears at the crest of a hill, faint and hard to see. The probe slides out and slowly glides away, following the terrain.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Galang, Jacobs, and the scientists are mesmerized by the live feed from the probe.

MABRY

Remarkable. We are watching what happened eight hundred... Jacobs! The doorway is at ground-level. Stuff can get through.

JACOBS

These are the coordinates they gave me. Besides, as if birds couldn't get through before.

MABRY

There is a difference between birds and people. This could...

GALANG

Enough! Jacobs, pan around and let's see where we are.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

The probe stops and turns on its axis slowly.

PROBE POV

Visible light view of sweeping grasslands, river ecology.

A half-kilometer away, hundreds of squat Mongolian warriors on horseback escort oxen pulling an elaborate wagon. On the wagon bed, there is a large rectangle wrapped in bright blue sheets, then the view leaves them behind.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Everybody collectively gasps.

GALANG

Wait! Go back.

Mabry walks away from the rest of the group, lost in thought.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

Just as the probe stops turning, the sun FLASHES across its front, then it turns back towards the Mongols.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Mabry moves to a laptop off to the side and begins typing.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

Several Mongols look uphill towards the probe. One gestures excitedly and spurs his horse. Dozens of riders break off from the main group and race towards the probe.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

JACOBS

Shit!

GALANG

Recall it... now!

JACOBS

I am... I am.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

The probe spins on its axis and moves back towards the distortion.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Galang motions to the collected scientists.

GALANG

Get ready to shut the reactor down.

The scientists hurry off as Jacobs types away at his keyboard.

JACOBS

I'm getting funny readings! The probe is... shit! It stopped sending.

Galang watches the distortion hovering over the ring.

GALANG

Where is it?

JACOBS

I don't know... it must be dead.

Galang yells over the rail and points to a big-eared scientist (big ears) and a wild haired scientist (wild hair)

GALANG

Go and get it... hurry!

The scientists look at each other in disbelief, then brace themselves and plunge into the distortion.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

The scientists step out of the distortion and stumble around in shock as one of them trips over the probe. Numerous YELLS startle them. Several Mongols raise bows and arrows as their horses race uphill.

Big ears panics and points at the oncoming Mongols. Wild hair grabs the probe and tosses it into the distortion, then follows it as the Mongols scream in rage. Big ears stutter-steps towards the distortion, looking over his shoulder as the Mongols release arrows.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

The probe bounces into the facility erratically. A scientist stands by the reactor controls. Others mill around underneath the platform railing, nervously watching as wild hair returns.

On the platform, Mabry turns, completely undone.

MABRY

Close it before they kill us all!

Galang looks at Mabry in disbelief.

GALANG

What the hell are you talking about?

MABRY

(shrill)

That was... is Ghengis Khan's funeral procession. They killed all witnesses to hide the location of his tomb.

Big ears POPS through the distortion at a dead run. Arrows fly out of the distortion and he windmills to the floor, his torso pierced in numerous spots. Wild hair screams and goes down with an arrow through a thigh.

EXT. IKH KHORIG - CONTINUOUS

The Mongols' horses balk at the distortion. The horsemen jump off their mounts and hesitate, almost reverent, until the apparent leader points into it with his sword and screams.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

Galang yells at the scientist frantically working the reactor controls.

GALANG

Shut it down!

JACOBS

Too late!

Mongols pour out of the distortion, hesitating to look around in wonder. One reverently grabs the probe and backs towards the distortion. Then a spearman snaps out of his awe and screams bloody murder at the paralyzed scientists. The rest of the Mongols echo the scream -- bowmen shoot arrows and wild-eyed swordsmen attack.

Wild hair tries to crawl away, but a swordsman splits his skull with a swipe.

A swordsman grabs a long-haired scientist by his ponytail and beheads him, then yells and lifts the severed head high. The remaining scientists scream and scatter in terror.

Galang heaves a large table down the stairs, blocking the way. A bowman looses several arrows at Galang, who ducks behind the console, too late to avoid taking one in the shoulder. Jacobs ducks with him as Mabry sprawls on the floor, gasping with an arrow through his chest.

A Mongol spearman narrowly misses impaling the scientist working the reactor controls and stabs deep into the control panel instead. There is a muffled BOOM and a shower of SPARKS as an EXPLOSION of steam sends the scientist and Mongol flying.

JACOBS quickly peeks from behind the console as Galang grimaces and gingerly touches the arrow in his shoulder.

JACOBS (CONT'D)

They hit the reactor.

Galang struggles to peek at the reactor, then falls back.

GALANG

Damn it! That's coolant. Why aren't the safeties kicking in?! If we don't shut it down...

Mabry rolls his head towards them and struggles to speak. He gasps intermittently as he speaks.

MABRY

Too late. It's going to detonate any moment. We were the cause. The doorway will channel the force of the explosion into the past and we'll be stuck in a never-ending time loop of retrocausality.

Mabry dies as...

WHITE OUT:

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FADE OUT:

THE END