

CONUNDRUM

Written by

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**INT. DINER - DAY**

Two businessmen sit across a breakfast table from each other. HAMMOND, late 30's, shows his age around his waist, finishes his breakfast.

CAISSON, wiry, glasses, intent with a light, nervous energy. An open briefcase sits in the chair nearest him. A closed manila folder rests on the table between the two.

CAISSON

Got a good one for you. Ever wonder why we aren't further along than we should be?

HAMMOND

I'm sure I'm gonna regret this.

Hammond takes a long, cautious sip of coffee.

HAMMOND

What do you mean?

CAISSON

Jet packs, rocket ships, the space race, quantum physics, cloning? I mean all the technology is there, but we've just stalled.

HAMMOND

Politics.

CAISSON

Politics?

HAMMOND

Yeah, politics. After Kennedy, putting us on the moon didn't really mean putting voters in the booth or checks on the ballots. Guess Watergate kinda soured people. Anyway, no Space 1999. So what?

CAISSON

What if I told you we may be living a lie.

HAMMOND

I feel that way every day.

CAISSON

What if I could prove it?

HAMMOND

Sure, take you're best shot.

CAISSON

I was digging into the history of computers and the Internet. You know, when it all started, how it got going, the players, how exponential it grew.

The waitress slips in to refill Hammond's upraised cup.

HAMMOND

Still trying to figure out a way through the Uncanny Valley.

CAISSON

So I like to push envelopes. You KNOW it's there.

Caisson and Hammond have been here before.

CAISSON

I dropped in on Disco and Evil.

HAMMOND

I knew I'd regret this.

CAISSON

Just...anyway. We start digging. Back to basics. Binary language. COMSCI. From Cobol and Fortran to ASCII.

Hammond takes a slow sip of coffee.

CAISSON

Well, he went back to the first couple of internet relays starting in '62 with DARPA and IPTO. Licklider's protocols, all the way up to the first conversation in '69 at the Stanford Research Institute.

Caisson catches himself.

CAISSON

You know how Evil Steve loves his conspiracies.

Caisson pulls a file from a folder on the table. Slides a graph across.

Hammond takes a look at it.

HAMMOND

What's this?

CAISSON

These are the four confirmed internet relays in use in 1970 by the military.

HAMMOND

There's five grids listed.

CAISSON

Exactly.

Hammond shrugs. Sips his coffee.

CAISSON

The technology didn't exist for TCP/IP back then, not even for the military.

HAMMOND

I don't follow.

CAISSON

TCP/IP is the standard nomenclature for internet protocols, developed in 1974 and not put in place until late '78.

HAMMOND

And?

CAISSON

The IP address for that computer station is the standard 4 packet address we use today. Those didn't start until 2001. The first four grids had singular packets for an address. This fifth grid didn't exist until 2007.

HAMMOND

So someone had a computer with an IP address that was too long.

CAISSON

In 1970? Thirty years before it was necessary. I don't think so. Why? Here's the other thing. The reason no one ever noticed?

Caisson leans in close across the table.

CAISSON

No one ever knew, because the technology to detect it didn't exist back then. No one needed to detect it, because it never was.

Caisson slips another grid across the table. It is the same information dated 1971. It lists an additional grid.

CAISSON

Somehow, someone is using a modern computer in 1971.

HAMMOND

How? Why?

CAISSON

Why? What if you could've had today's internet access when you were in high school, college? Instant knowledge at your finger tips before anyone else.

HAMMOND

Okay, but the internet didn't exist back then, there was nothing to access.

Hammond parks his coffee cup for a moment. Waves the waitress over. Smiles as she refills his cup.

HAMMOND

Even if you had a computer there'd be nothing on it. It'd be like having cable TV with nobody broadcasting. Just a big box with static.

CAISSON

Then, right. But what if you were getting your signal from now?

HAMMOND

A computer in the past talking to the internet today?

Caisson settles back in his seat. This is the moment.

CAISSON

What if you had the tools to decipher that static?

HAMMOND

You're telling me someone is accessing today's internet on a computer in 1971.

CAISSON

Imagine the applications. Time travel without moving in time. Just information. Knowing things before they happen?

HAMMOND

But your supposition doesn't hold water. Everything is still the same.

CAISSON

Is it?

HAMMOND

And now you've now lost me.

Realization dawns.

HAMMOND

Oh no. You don't mean.

CAISSON

And the light switch flips.

Caisson beams.

HAMMOND

Why aren't we...

CAISSON

...further along. It's all there. All the knowledge. It's the WE that aren't.

Hammond draws hard on his coffee. Motions the waitress over.

CAISSON

Makes your mind twist, doesn't it.

HAMMOND

Yeah, but if that's the worst ramification, that our here and now doesn't have jet packs. I think we're good.

CAISSON

Jennifer Albright.

HAMMOND

Oh, don't even.

CAISSON

If you had that knowledge back then? You'd be a different person. Think about? What if someone decided they could give a rip about world domination or unlimited riches.

Caisson lets the thought hang in the air.

HAMMOND

They just wanted to get the one that got away.

CAISSON

At the very least.

HAMMOND

And you got all this from a piece of paper with an extra couple of numbers on it. From Disco Mike and Evil Steve.

CAISSON

Not so much.

HAMMOND

Okay.

CAISSON

I saw the same truck twice today.

HAMMOND

I had four eggs for breakfast and I'm pretty sure, other than the cholesterol, it didn't really change my life much.

CAISSON

No. I saw the exact same truck. Old beat up red Chevy pick up with a gold door, two Mexicans and a bright orange mower in the back. Distinctive truck. At 15th and Ames at 8:55 and again at 8:59.

Caisson shuffles the papers back into his briefcase.

CAISSON

Same direction, same intersection. It drove right in front of me.

(MORE)

CAISSON (CONT'D)

Before the light changed, drove by again. That's not the creepy part.

He glances over his shoulder back at the front door.

CAISSON

When the light changed? A car pulled up beside me. Yellow Xterra. Turned right.

HAMMOND

Okay. So...

CAISSON

Yellow Xterra? The Bug? MY yellow Xterra. And the kicker? I was driving it.

HAMMOND

Right.

CAISSON

Don't believe me? Ask me.

Caisson indicates the door as he gets up to leave. Over his shoulder, Caisson Two enters the diner.

Heads to Hammond beaming. Hammond stares as Caisson gives him a short wave from the back of the restaurant.

Caisson Two pulls up a chair, sits down hurriedly.

CAISSON TWO

Hey, Hammond. How's it going?

Pulls out a folder. Sits it on the table between them.

CAISSON TWO

Got a good one for you. Ever wonder why we aren't further along than we should be?