

**BERWICK LITTLE'S HOLIDAY**  
**BY STEVEN GAYTHORPE**

Berwick Little liked his quiet life.

He liked the way his weekends were always the same. Saturday; a weekly shop, butchers, greengrocers, delicatessen, home in time for a lunch of sliced, smoked ham, cheese and sliced, white bread. Saturday afternoon, clean his small, single-bedroomed flat, dust, vacuum, mop, bleach poured down the drains. He would be done in time for an early, light dinner, one pork chop, chips and beans, accompanied by a cheeky Shiraz. The evening would be spent reading, his current area of study was time travel and at this moment he was reading a book by Paul Davies.

His Sundays were more relaxed. An early breakfast of bacon and eggs on fried bread, was followed by a slow walk to the newsagent to buy *The Sunday Telegraph*. Then to the coast to a little tearoom for a cream tea and a chance to read the magazine, he left the newspaper until he returned home later that day. He would walk to the beach and spend exactly thirty minutes skimming stones on the sea. At 12pm he would catch the train home. Lunch would be a pork pie, pickled onions, cheddar cheese and sliced white bread. In the afternoon he would take a long hot bath, during which he would read the rest of the newspaper. After the bath he would settle down in front of one bar of the electric fire and read.

He was currently reading *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe* by Richard Gott.

At the weekend he went to bed at approximately 10pm, instead of exactly 10pm during the week. He slept in a single bed, and had done since he was old enough to sleep in a bed.

He was always glad when the weekend ended, and he would let out a little sigh of relief at approximately 10pm every Sunday when he got into bed. The weekend was over and he was going back to work tomorrow.

Just before he drifted off to sleep his thoughts would linger on Holly Hu. His relationship with Holly was unrequited, she was a colleague after all, it was only right. But he would rerun the last he had seen in the hope that he would dream of her.

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Berwick's office was on one of the long-forgotten lower basement corridors. Within each small office along this corridor was a great brain, a research fellow exploring the length, breadth and depth of their particular science.

On the way to his office he passed the doors labelled with the names of his colleagues: Ed Carter, Artificial Intelligence; Matthew Redfern, Transportation; Peas-Blossom Smith, Space Travel; Dibdin Jones, Solar Energy and Holly Hu, Temporal Physics. On his own door was tacked a piece of paper, made tatty with time, written on it in biro was: Berwick Little, Futurologist.

Berwick unlocked the door and entered his office. It was a small neat space, almost a cliché of a study, walls full of books, a large mahogany, leather-topped desk, a small chair at the desk and an armchair against one wall. Papers and magazines were piled up neatly on the floor. The only sop to the modern age was a very incongruous-looking black MacBook, which sat open and ready on the desk.

As he took off his coat Berwick cast his eye over his office and smiled. He loved this room. It was, in his eyes, perfect, everything that he could ever wish for in a working space. He draped his coat on the desk chair and switched the laptop on in one fluid movement. As the laptop chimed its good morning he moved to the small fridge in the corner of the room, upon which stood an electric kettle, tea pot and cup and a caddy of Earl Grey tea leaves. He filled the kettle with spring water that he kept in the fridge.

Whilst the kettle was heating the water he checked his emails. The only email in his inbox was Holly's peculiar last message, which stated that she had reached the ends of theoretical study and now needed to prove something. She ended the message by saying that she had always loved him and that she hoped they would meet again soon. When he read the email Berwick had howled like a cat whose tail had been trodden on. He had received this message almost a month ago, and he still felt a twinge of pain, but would read it every morning when arrived at work.

He poured boiling water over two scoops of Earl Grey tea leaves. He stirred the fragrant infusion three times and then put the teapot's lid on. When the tea had brewed, a cup of black tea in one hand and a copy of *Time Traveller* by Ronald L. Mallett and Bruce Henderson in the other, he made himself comfortable in the armchair.

And that was when someone knocked at his office door. He sighed, if anyone else had heard that sound it would break their hearts.

"Come in," said Berwick.

Into the room stepped Dibdin Jones, a short, smartly business-suited man with an expression on his face that made you instantly mistrust him.

"Good morning Little," he said. "How are we today?"

"I am well thank you," replied Berwick, politely. "How are you?"

"I am absolutely and utterly fantastic, thank you. Today is the big day, decision day, one of us poor research fellows will be invited to the top table to be a big dog: Senior Research Fellow. And by 'one of us' I mean me, of course. No more teaching, no more sitting down here in this damp fetid place with you losers."

"We don't know which one of us will be promoted," said Berwick, calmly ignoring Dibdin's rudeness, "it could be any one of us."

"Ha! Unlikely my dear Berwick, look at me," he held out his arms and did a turn, "I am the future, business-savvy and intelligent, suited and booted - smart of brain and of dress. Unlike the rest of you fellows, who look like you could do with a good iron. These are not people that the university needs as its public face, it needs me."

Berwick shook his head. "We shall see. And if they choose you..."

"When."

"I am quite happy where I am, doing my small bit for the university." As he spoke he waved the copy of *Time Traveler*, which caught Dibdin's attention.

"What's this?" he asked.

"It's Mallett's and Henderson's Time Traveller."

"Are you interested in time travel, Berwick?"

"Yes ... of course."

"But you're a Futurologist. You study ways in which we can better prepare for what will happen in the future. Surely," Dibdin laughed. "Surely if you could travel in time and see the future that would be cheating?"

"I am not cheating," said Berwick through gritted teeth. "I think you have said enough. You can leave now."

"Very well, I should be going anyway, I expect the university board are trying to contact me to tell me the good news. Goodbye, Berwick." And with a final sneer he left.

Berwick was furious. He stood and paced his room, breathing in through his nose, out through his mouth.

Cheating? Berwick? Never. Not since that one time. He could still remember the shame of waiting outside the headmaster's office. Hot tears pouring down his face. Shaking uncontrollably. Waiting for the command to enter.

Dibdin's visit had effectively ruined the day for Berwick. He could no longer concentrate on his reading, he let his tea go cold untouched, all he could do was pace and seethe quietly to himself.

Cheater? Berwick did not cheat, he could not cheat, he would not cheat. How dare Dibdin joke about that, how dare he?

He had no students to see that day so he decided to leave early, just after lunch, which he missed - two things that he never normally did. He decided to walk the five miles home; he continued to mutter darkly under his breath the whole way. Passers-by, who would normally pay him no attention, crossed the street to avoid him.

Cheat? No, he had learnt his lesson at school.

It took him three hours to walk, it should have only taken him two hours but he got so into his own little world of anger that he took a wrong turn and ended up miles out of his way. So what with the detour and the walking home he arrived home at the time he would normally after a day at work. His routine was not completely destroyed.

That evening he prepared dinner, quickly and with no real pleasure in the experience. The meal as a result was foul and flavourless, but Berwick ate it, his mind was elsewhere. For the first time in years, decades even, he wasn't reading a book during a meal. His mind was in the past, as he ran the memory over and over in his mind.

He had been thirteen. He had attended a prestigious school that prided itself on gaining entrance to Oxbridge for the maximum number of its pupils. This was achieved by rigorous and continual examination. A process that proved very stressful for Berwick. The pressure to pass all the examinations had led him to prioritise his studies and concentrate on those subjects that he was really interested in pursuing. The one subject he was not interested in pursuing he decided to cheat. He justified his behaviour to himself by saying that he would not really benefit from the cheating as he no intention of pursuing the subject beyond school - and he was really only doing it to maintain the school's 100 per cent record of Oxbridge undergraduates.

This had been almost his exact argument to the headmaster after he was inevitably caught cheating. But though had impressed the old man, but did not change his fate. Berwick was expelled. His expulsion meant that he did not get into the Oxbridge college of his choice, and he had to settle for one of the smaller red bricks.

His former fellow pupils became professors, but he became a research fellow; the lowest of the low, and for all his positivity he disliked being a research fellow.

Berwick did not sleep very well that night.

He was eventually woken by his alarm. His morning shower was cold because he had neglected to switch on the water heater. Breakfast was burnt toast and stewed black tea.

He arrived at the university, looking unkempt and unshaven, exactly seven minutes late. Before he had the chance to get down to his office he bumped into one of the administrative who told him that he was expected immediately in the Chancellor's office.

The Chancellor was usually a jolly fellow. His well-fed frame was clothed in fabric that reflected his usual state of being; a yellow shirt, brightly patterned waistcoat, golden-coloured corduroy trousers and a lime green Tweed jacket. On this occasion, though, he seemed uncomfortable around Berwick.

"Berwick... my dear boy ... it seems an absolute age since you've been in my office, for which I apologise, very remiss of me."

Berwick gave the Chancellor a short, cold smile.

"Well as you know," the Chancellor continued, "we have been looking to create another Senior Research Fellow."

Berwick nodded.

The Chancellor sighed. "Unfortunately we have decided not to the senior post to you. We have decided to promote Dibdin. You are both excellent candidates ... it's just he ..."

"... has better dress sense," added Berwick.

The Chancellor sighed again. "Yes," he admitted, "I suppose that's true."

Berwick just nodded. "Thank you," he said and stood up and left.

Berwick stormed into his office, he swept his arm across his desk, scattering books and paper across the room. A Guide To Practical Time Travel flew higher than the rest, rebounded off a wall and struck Berwick so hard on the head that he sat down on the floor with an "oof".

He regarded the book's cover as he was sitting on the floor. To date his study of this subject had been merely as part of his larger research into the future,

one of many "what ifs" that he considered. He knew that his colleague Holly Hu was doing more serious research into time travel, but she had mysteriously disappeared a month ago so he could not ask her advice on this subject.

But now the practical usefulness of time travel started to become apparent. He did not want to travel to the future - that would be cheating - but to the past, to where it all began to go wrong. He was vaguely aware that Holly had once mentioned the possibility of a paradox: if he changed history, whose history would he change; if his past became a perfect future then who traveled back in time to make that future? But he didn't let that bother him - he was determined to do it anyway.

Later, when the corridor is quiet and all the other research fellows had gone home or to the bar Berwick left his office and made his way to Holly's room.

Holly Hu's office is three times the size of the other research fellows. There had been a lot of lurid speculation amongst her colleagues about how she had managed to acquire it. She never told them, the speculation amused her, and the truth was that it was pure luck and nothing more.

The room still smelt of her. Berwick breathed deep, pulling her into his lungs. He really missed her, she had always been kind to him, and he hoped that wherever she was, she was safe.

Berwick looked around the room and was astonished by the sight. Along the wall, scattered across the floor and piled on a drawing board were hundreds of blueprints. All covered by a thin layer of dust.

Thanks to his current topic of study, Berwick recognized most of the schematics. And if he was reading them right - from this brief scan - it seemed that Holly Hu had cracked it. She had managed to design a time machine that could actually travel through time.

"I'm just going to borrow these," he said to the memory of Holly and picked up all the plans from the drawing board, floor and the walls. "I need to make things better."

He staggered back to his office hugging the bundles of blueprints.

Later, back at his office, he pinned a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the outside of his office door.

Time, funnily enough, passed at its natural pace.

Berwick's absence and hermit-like behaviour caused absolutely no comment whatsoever amongst his colleagues.

Over two months packages arrived outside his office and disappeared inside.

The corridor outside Berwick's office filled with dust, boxes, bin liners, and empty trays from the canteen.

And finally it was done.

Berwick stood and stared at his creation, he was unshaven and stained with food and sweat.

A device that looked like a combination of kinetic art and a reclining exercise bike now filled most of the office.

Berwick Little had built himself a time machine.

Later, after a trip to the university's shower facilities, a clean-shaven and clean-clothed Berwick sat within the time machine's tangle of metal. He had wired his laptop into the machine. Holly had written some software called Kronos that seemed to control the machine and tell it when to go.

Berwick readied himself for his journey. Was he ready to say goodbye to all this? Yes. Absolutely. Was he concerned that he had not finished his current research? Yes. A little. Was he upset that he may never see Holy Hu again? Yes, yes, yes. But he could always come looking for her in his new life.

He entered the date 27.05.1984 into Kronos. He sighed. He pushed the enter key.

The time machine vibrated. Berwick started to sweat. The time machine vanished.

Time passed. Very quickly.

Dust collected within Berwick's office. Mail and packages appeared by the door. The desk and chairs disappeared. The room was empty.

The time machine reappeared as silently as it disappeared.

The moment it reappeared Berwick fell out of the time machine and retched. His face was pale and sweaty. He stood up and walked around the room, breathing deeply, trying to make sure that he did not vomit.

After a few moments he noticed his surroundings. The room was empty of all furniture, the walls looked clean and new. Berwick was delighted. He giggled with excitement. The time machine had worked he had traveled back in time. He had to explore and hoped that if were spotted his Tweed suit was generic enough to pass in 1984.

The corridor that Berwick stepped into was cleaner and brighter than in his own time. It looked brand new. It was also deserted, which worried Berwick, until he remembered that today was a Sunday. He had chosen this day because it was the day that he had bought the essay from the school swot, which he had then copied, handed in as own and then had been spotted by the teacher instantly as a cheat.

His plan was to travel to his old school by train and waylay the swot by posing as a new teacher and putting him in detention. It was foolproof.

Berwick walked down the corridor, away from his office towards the stairwell that led out of the research fellow basement. But when he reached the end of the corridor the ascending stairway was no longer accessible, it had been blocked off by a wall so completely it appeared never to have existed. The stairs still went down to the lower basement - a dark and depressing place that had housed, in Berwick's time, the IT staff.

Berwick was very confused and a little frightened. He realised that perhaps he should have studied the building plans before travelling back in time. Perhaps the stairway to the ground floor was on the other side in 1984?

As he made his way back along the corridor in his search for the way out of the basement Berwick's eye was caught by a notice board. The board contained a calendar of up and coming events and talks. The date was clearly marked. The date was May 2018.

Berwick had travelled into the future by mistake.

Berwick ran back to his office, his mind full of panic. The date on the laptop screen was clear: 27.05.2018. He sighed and shook his head, somehow, he didn't know how, he had typed in the wrong year.

Berwick sat down amongst the time machine. With great care he typed in the numbers: 2705198 and 4. He checked and double-checked the numbers and when he was absolutely sure that he had typed them into the program correctly he pressed the enter key.

The time machine disappeared. One second and ten years later the time machine reappeared.

Angela Wilson was startled by the sudden appearance of the time machine in her room. She jumped up from her office chair, grabbed a decorative, but heavy, paperweight and brandished it, ready to strike.

Berwick suffered very badly from time-travel sickness - he collapsed out of the time machine, his internal vertical hold has reversed, what was up was down. He passed out at Angela's feet.

When he awoke, Berwick found that Angela had put his head on a crocheted cushion and she was now studying the time machine. She noticed her unexpected visitor was awake. "This is a time machine," she said.

Berwick groaned. "Am I back in time?"

Angela looked at him. "I don't know," she said. "When did you travel from?"

"What date is it?"

"Twenty-seventh May," she replied.

"And the year?"

"Twenty eight. Twenty twenty eight."

Berwick groaned again.

"Is there a problem?" she asked.

"The machine is broken! I'm trying to get back to 1984, but every time I try I travel forward, not back."

"Where did you start?"

"Two thousand and eight."

"The year Holly Hu disappeared?" Angela asked. "I've read her notes and plans, they don't mention any problem like this. But of course her work remains incomplete. Did you know her?"

"Yes, she was a friend of mine, we were research fellows together."

"I'm Angela."

"Berwick. Berwick Little."

"I've heard of you. You disappeared in 2008 as well. Legend says that you were murdered by the environmental terrorist Dibdin Jones. Some people think that you are buried somewhere in this basement and that your ghost walks the corridor at night." She sniffed. "Lot of nonsense if you ask me."

"Did you say environmental terrorist?"

"Yes," she said. "Dibdin Jones held the world to ransom twenty-five years ago with his solar doomsday device. When the world's governments refused to pay he scorched the surface of half the planet. Most people live on what we call the green side, but a few of us live on the dark side of the world. We live like moles, mostly in the basements of old universities, researching the effects of the scorching."

This news depressed Berwick, but it also gave him fresh impetuosity to return to the past and change the future. Now he would be doing it for the whole of mankind, not just himself.

Angela gave a small, embarrassed cough. "Would you like to have dinner with me?" she asked shyly. "I see so few new faces down here and you must be hungry after your travelling."

Berwick frowned. "Nothing would give me more pleasure, but I have to travel back in time and change the future."

"But..." began Angela.

"Goodbye," said Berwick. "and thank you for your kindness."

He climbed back into the time machine and once again he typed the numbers 2705198 and 4 and pressed enter.

The time machine disappeared.

Angela stood and stared at the empty space and shook her head.

The time machine reappeared.

His new sense of purpose enabled Berwick to manage the feelings of nausea. But his stomach sank when he saw the date on the computer screen: 24.05.2038.

Once more he typed in the numbers 2405198 and 4 and pressed enter.

When the time machine reappeared the date on the screen was 24.05.2048.

He typed in the numbers and pressed enter.

When the time machine reappeared the date on the screen was 24.05.2058.

When the time machine reappeared the date on the screen was 24.05.2068.

Berwick typed in the numbers 2405198 and 4 and punched the enter key so hard that the time machine jolted to the left. Then it disappeared. For the first time Berwick could see his journey. He flew sideways through what looked like a black drain with pale yellow, blue and pinks lights blurred in the background, in the foreground and within him and without him. This was different thought Berwick, it seemed to be working at last.

The time machine reappeared.

The room felt organic. Roots hung from the ceiling, and the walls were green with moss. If this was the past - it was a far distance past that probably included dinosaurs.

The laptop screen was black. Smoke seeped from the vents underneath it.

Berwick bellowed with frustration.

The noise was echoed by someone else, in a room further down the corridor. The sound brought Berwick to his senses.

He clambered out of his time machine, ducked under the thick root of a tree and entered a space that was more tunnel of dirt than corridor. And there stood before him was a small, attractive Chinese woman. Holly Hu smiled at Berwick and ran towards him. They embraced like old lovers.

Later, after they had each recounted their different adventures with their time machines they sat together at the bottom of the stairs.

"Berwick," whispered Holly.

"Yes," he replied.

"I have been thinking," she said. "I have a theory as to why we can't travel back in time."

"Oh."

"It's like this: pebbles don't roll up hill. It is physically impossible to move backwards in time. The past has gone, all that exists is the now moving slowly through time - all we can do is press the fast forward button."

Berwick just nodded. "I'm glad that I found you," he said.

Holly smiled. "Me too," she said. "Why don't we go explore. See what the world is like now."

They stood and made their way slowly up the stairs. The stone of the stairs was worn almost to a slope and it was difficult to avoid the slide back down to the basement.

The stair led to fresh clean air. The planet had renewed itself. What had once been a city was now a forest. No sign of buildings existed beyond the ancient stairs they had just climbed.

Overwhelmed by the beauty that surrounded them, they sat in the shade of an ancient oak tree.

"Berwick," said Holly.

"Yes Holly," he replied.

"I think I know why both our time machines stopped working at the same time."

"Really?"

"It's because there's no more time for us to travel in. We have reached the end of the universe. There is simply no more time."

"Kiss me," said Berwick.

And just as their lips touch and their mouths opened together, the universe ended, like the lights had been turned out across existence.