

The Map of Time

by [Justin Wong](#) (May 2024)



An Inventor –Serafima Ryangina, 1929

Part 1

On certain evenings when the feelings of boredom took me, and my wife of some years was engrossed in some T.V. show that I was categorically uninterested in, I went off to see a dear companion of mine: Winston Hawksridge. It was a welcome retreat apart from the usual weekday evening, where after work, I would commute home, and spend the evening indoors, reading, or another activity of leisure. Hawksridge was in fact a friend I had known for some years, and was eccentric as he was amiable, as harebrained as he was harmless. This eccentricity was related to his ingenuity—he was always in his lab inventing some kind of contraption: a valve; a flying machine; a robot with some practical import, etc.

On the evening that I was going to see him, I was looking forward to see what new thing he created or was in the act of creating—what thoughts obsessed his mind.

Whenever I went to see him, I made it a habit to walk and not take the vehicle. It was good exercise for me to do so, besides, it wasn't unusual for the both of us, on one of our famous get togethers, to have a tippie, where I would become drunk to a degree that I would be unfit to drive home.

This evening, I walked there through seemingly peaceful streets, the busyness characterising the rush hour, when I was last reacquainted with the world, had now died considerably down. The roads were empty aside from the odd car that passed me by, couples walking their dogs, or the chance spotting of children that cycled through the streets. The minutes went swimmingly by, and by the time I arrived, I felt that I was more alive, my heart beating with a voracity. I knew not if this was because of the mild exercise I engaged in, or if I was feeling particularly nervous in a kind of intuition of the scepticism I was going to feel that evening. I reflect back on

this, and I am still unaware.

Part 2

I knocked on the door and was met with a familiar figure, and though I rang him earlier in the day to ask him if he was free to meet up that evening, he seemed as if blindsided by my arrival. I was nevertheless let in, where I was met with my friend in the flesh, Hawksridge, sporting a mound of thick, loosely curled and unkempt hair, and scruffy attire. The small talk as per usual was minimal, and it wasn't long before I found a seat in the living room and he handed me a customary snifter of brandy.

I brought up the things he showed me previously, the contraptions he made before, or was making before which he presented to me on my last visit. Though I quickly noticed that he became uninterested in these things, as if the ideas that once possessed him, on prior visits, were now leaving him cold and dispassionate.

I hoped that this was some kind of phase he was going through—a moment of ennui—and he had not given up on the inventing bug altogether. What I wished to say was that I hoped that his inventions such that he spent a considerable time labouring over, weren't some kind of youthful fad, that he was losing interest in as he matured.

“Are you alright? You seem cold and despondent,” I said.

“Why do you say that?” he exclaimed.

“I bring up your inventions, the ones you couldn't keep your mouth shut about weeks previously and you seem uninterested. Have you gone off them altogether?”

“Ha—no, if only.” Was his response. “if anything, I am deeper in the act of creation. It's just the ones I have previously

shown you are finished, or I have no interest in anymore. I am busy working on something new."

"Something new?" My interest roused as he mentioned this, "can you hint at it?"

"I can, but you'll have to be patient whilst I try to explain. What do you see over there?" Winston asked me, asked me as he pointed to a framed image on the wall."

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is a map, of the world as it happens."

"Quite, and what do you have on your left wrist?"

"I have a watch, it was a gift I was given a few years back," I said.

"And don't you see the connection between the two?"

"No, I can't say that I do."

"One of them helps us navigate space, whilst the other one does the same to time."

"Yes, well I never quite thought of it in this way, but I suppose you're right. But so what? Both inventions are incredibly useful, and have been done to death, haven't they. The entire globe has been mapped out perfectly, and watches have been with us for centuries now. If you think this is going to be your claim to fame, you're a bit too late."

"I think you are misunderstanding me. I desire to make neither clock nor map. But why do we desire to invent these things? To obsessively measure reality?"

"I don't know."

"Because it helped us to dominate the world. With use of our maps, our ships were able to arrive at their destinations with uncanny accuracy. A system of time in clocks and calendars

helped us to plan for the future with correct foresight. “

“Yes, though how does this relate to you creating a new device?”

“I am working on a device to combine the two aspects, creating *a map of time*.

“A map of time! And what should that consist of?” I exclaimed with surprise.

“Well, it’s a map/clock- a device that predict the future from whatever moment of time you are in.”

“Wow!” I said incredulous as to this, the idea that the future could be mapped out as one might mere terrain. “

“You look like you are in state of disbelief, are you unconvinced that it could be done?”

“Excuse me my dear friend, it’s not that I don’t believe that it can be done, it’s that I can’t imagine how it can be done.”

“Well, that is the hard part, in which I am busy working away at this moment. But I can see its practical applications.”

“And what are they? Would a world where everything is predictable be one that is boring? Part of what makes life interesting is that it’s enigmatic.”

“My map of time is not going to be a key to unlock all of the mysteries of the Universe. Just those where it matters in regard to social catastrophe—in terms of history, politics, economics, etc. and this could help the world become all the more stable and prepare for the unforeseen.”

“Interesting, and how far along are you with this?”

“For now, it’s in its developmental stages. I’ll be sure to show it to you when I am finished.”

“Excellent.”

Part 3

For the rest of that night, we talked much, in between the customary glasses of brandy, until the time veered past 11pm, and I decided it was best that I exit from his abode and be on my way. It being a midweek evening, it was adamant that I awake the following morning for work, and seeing as I walked there it was only natural that I walk back, even in my less than sober state. Accounting for this, I would probably arrive back to mine at my usual bedtime of twelve, to find my wife still awake in bed and reading. She was not very pleased whenever I went out drinking, in case this became an incorrigible habit. But she also liked my time away at times, if only for the moments when she had the house to herself and could, at least for a few hours, do as she pleased. When I arrived home that night, I wasn't met with a harassing other half, but a woman happy that I had got something from my evening apart from her, as she did of her's apart from me.

But in the subsequent week, I couldn't keep my mind off Winston, and his clock which was also a map, or map that was also a clock. As he said, it would not simply be a tool to tell people where or when things are but gave a man the ability to chart, quite ambitiously, the course of history. This, at least from the confines of my meagre mind, seemed an impossibility. Was this friend of mine, who once seemed so sober minded, reasonable, and grounded, slowly beginning to lose it?" And was my interest in his scheme not so much an interest, though an enabling?"

I longed to find out, and in the time since last I saw him, I thought of little else, When I was driving, I thought of the map of time; when I was cooking, I thought of the map of time; when I was pulling weeds in the garden, I thought of the map

of time. I didn't mean to harass him, ringing up every or every other day, asking him if his project—the one he so passionately relayed to me—was complete, or whether it was still in the works. I knew him only too well, and that he would find such behaviour irritating, besides it might serve to delay rather than to speed up his contraption, the one I was desperate to see.

Though as much as I waited for the customary call, of when he was going show the invention he mentioned to me only weeks before, I never heard from him. This was unusual, I was willing to admit, and although he was a man who very much flourished in solitude—a self-seeding plant much akin to a gladiola – he was known at times to crave company and would ring me to check in if only momentarily. I took this to be that he was busy working on the thing I knew he was enthralled with creating, as much as I was with seeing.

I let him be, not deciding to ring him up at random, wondering if he had finished his invention, or if he had gone mad trying to complete the incompletable. Was I right to think this?

Part 4

It is important to tell you the story of the next time I ran into Winston. I was driving the car with my wife beside me. It was a good day in the course of our marriage which can, from time to time, have its difficult moments, with the indescribably sense that we are considerably more distant than we were in chance hours of bliss. We had just driven from a Home Depot, where I had splashed the last week's pay for things for the kitchen, along with a couple of items for the garden. As I remember, we were in a joyous mood, my wife and I were laughing much, so much that our eruptions filled up the vehicle.

This was to be interrupted when my wife pointed out to the

left-hand window and said, "Is that Winston?"

I looked myself and saw the familiar figure of my friend who looked recognisably different, dishevelled even. This wasn't the thing that appeared most worrying, as he appeared to be moving around in a desultory manner—in circles—and speaking to himself. The car was moving at such a speed that I caught only a mere glimpse of this, and I wasn't in a position where I could turn around or stop.

I went home and reflected on this. Did my eyes deceive me; as did my wife's? Was he going mad, and more importantly, did I play a part in this? I thought it best that I go to this unannounced the following day to check up on him. To see if he dropped, as I suspected, into the depths of insanity.

Part 5

The Winston Hawksridge I knew wasn't always like this; meaning living a life alone. When I first met him, he was in fact attached to a woman named Natasha. It would be a cliché to say that he was naturally happier when he had a girlfriend that he saw on the regular, but clichés develop for an obvious reason. He seemed much more relaxed and jovial—the sort of person who might blend seamlessly into the crowd. He was still the same old Winston, meaning a man who was obsessed with his toolbox, his workbench—his experiments. But his passion was to a lesser degree in this hour when it was adamant that I drive over to have a check-up on him at night and unannounced.

I think it was rather obvious Natasha kept him grounded, with the influence of the fairer sex making him less prone to spend hours of a day locked up in some lightless hole. Naturally, with Natasha around, he was able to balance his hobbies with all of the facets of conventionality, going out, socialising, a healthy romantic interest with the opposite sex.

It was in this context that my wife sometimes came along with me to his house for dinner parties, where she would talk for hours with his other half, whilst Winston and I discussed mechanical things, him bringing me any problems with some or other device he was in the midst of creating. Natasha wasn't wholly discouraging of his obsession, nor the hours he spent working on them. I think she thought that if he was doing this, he wouldn't be doing other nefarious misdeeds, adultery for instance, not that they were married, or even betrothed, though you get the idea. Besides, another reason why she was encouraging of him in his pastime, was that she thought he might stumble upon something, coming up with a creation that he turned into a profit, becoming wealthy in the process.

But his peculiar eccentricities weren't the cause of why she was present one moment and had vanished clean the next. If the truth was to be known, an old flame contacted her from a previous life, in which after some trepidation, she left. This was very much out of the blue, it wasn't as if their relationship had frayed at the edges, after some months of contention.

Her vanishing from his life was in a sudden, swift instance, where she moved out all of her belongings when he was at work, for him to return to a carved out hollow, a home now devoid of a feminine presence.

All of these things, he confided in me. The strange thing was he seemed quite indifferent. I took this to be an act, obviously. But he retreated further and further into his works in this period, and as a result, his projects became larger, and his ideas, more outlandish. I assumed this was a way for him not to confront his emotions, to suppress a glut of feelings that would naturally well up.

I can't help but think that I was correct in my assumption, and this was why my wife and I saw him conversing with himself in the broad daylight as if taken with lunacy. It was also the

reason why I was there that night to check up on him, to see if he was really falling apart, or if when we saw him then he had a chance lapse of sanity.

After parking my car in the driveway, I walked up to the door, and knocked on it. I was met with nothing. I knocked it again, then I heard shuffling around behind, which I took to be a sign of human life. The door didn't open, but I heard the muffled though familiar voice of my friend say:

"Go away, I'm busy."

"It's me. I'm just checking in, to see if you are Ok," I said.

"I'm fine, I can't see you now, I'm too busy, I'll get in contact with you tomorrow, I promise."

I gave up and walked away, wondering if and how he would keep his promise.

Part 6

Even though I was doubtful that he would get back to me—thinking he made this pact to shew me away from his vicinity—I was surprised when two days post my going there, I heard word from him. This wasn't in the flesh as I suspected, but when I returned back from work, I found an envelope on the doormat. I thought little of this at first, even if this was unstamped, and looked as if it was posted by hand from the sender. This wasn't exactly unusual, and we received numerous letters delivered mainly by charities, wanting us to donate to their cause. Although the difference between this letter and theirs was this had my name written on it by hand. Even then, my immediate thought wasn't to think that it came from the pen of my kooky friend, but this is it what I came to see when I tore it open and started reading it.

My Good Friend,

I suspect that you have noticed that I haven't been as present in your life as I was before. I hope you don't think that have been avoiding you, or that being consumed in my project, that I'm losing a grip of reality. I must assure you that I am fine, fine as I have been in a while in fact. It just so happens that if one wants to create something of great importance, as I believe I am engaged in, one needs a tremendous amount of solitude.

When I came up with this idea, I thought I was merely coming up with an invention—a machine. How wrong was I to look at this so simply. Even machines like clocks represent an abstract idea in matter. This was what I found I was doing, putting an idea in reality, an unseen law in a physical, tangible item. This made me speculate deeply about the nature of history, much like cartographers I suspect, speculate deeply about aspects of geography—sea, sand, nations, people and cultures.

In order for the dream of my machine to become an achievable reality, I had to understand history fully, to see its patterns, its shape so to speak. I believe that history is not too far from our ideas of time and the world, meaning cyclical.

One can experience a day and arrive back at the same point they arrived at, meaning morning, in much the same manner that one can venture to the ends of the world, and arrive at the same place where they started. Can't the same thing be said about history? When we come to the point of oblivion, we arrive simultaneously at the point of creation. There is much cause to be pessimistic within this worldview, but there is cause for optimism also.

Doing so much studying in order to create my Map of Time, I think there is a predictable pattern to history and all

culture in general. The way I see it, the civilisation begun as did America. It was, at least at the time of its founding, birthed in barbarism—with a warring quest to conquer land. Then if you look at the culture of this time, it was naïve and young, this is why you can see in the novels of Henry James, the American protagonists are represented as innocence, versus the experience of the Europeans of the old world. From this morning of the world, we move to Ancient Greece. This can be characterised as a great flourishing of culture whether in thought or the arts. Think of the sculpture, architecture, and theatre in this period. Think of the heights of the philosophical dialogue and the prose masterpieces at this moment. It is a civilisation very much awakened and flourishing, to ascend to the heights of its zenith. After the culture alive in the noonday sun, we then move to the Europe of 18th and 19th century in the afternoon of the world. Here we see the culture becoming quelled in both the creation and dissemination of rational thought. Any vestige of innocence is gone, and the previous heights begin to become reduced in strength. This whole phase could be called a demystification—a grand process of demoralisation, if you will. This is particularly so, as people stop holding abstract ideas such as truth, honour, virtue, and fidelity as ideals, but start to view existence in more anthropocentric terms. Although this afternoon appears to be grey and dreary, we have yet to enter into the night of Rome. There you see civilisation, particularly in late Rome, disintegrate before your eyes, whether in degrees of sexual licence, the greed, the reliance on hand outs, the love of cheap and tawdry entertainments. Here is where it ends.

If you can boil the civilisational story to variations on these particular themes, then one can see a future that may appear to be murky and uncertain. Though I intend for my invention not only to be utilised for the big events –

those of world changing, historical importance, but rather, aspects of a quotidian existence. Our cycles of life take on the patterns that the broader world does also. If you are trapped in a drab and decrepit place, could a season of innocence be soon to appear? If one lost a job, or a significant other, the law of the world dictates a return – hope one could say.

I pray that my explanations are uncontaminated and clear. Anyway, if they are not, please don't fret. I will explain it in more detail when next we meet, then I can unveil it for you.

Thank you for your patience.

–Winston Hawksridge.

Part 7

I went around his home shortly after this, wondering what I'd find. Naturally, my expectations weren't high, I thought he was losing his mind, after all. Though I decided to go over there out of curiosity, if anything else.

After being allowed in and doing all of the characteristic formalities, I sat down as usual in his living room. It was clear that he wanted the unveiling of his invention to be ceremonial as a car company unleashing to the public, their latest model. Although in this case it was to be an audience of one. I took a seat on his living room sofa, and he said, quite excitedly, "The thing I have discussed with you before, a new revolutionary device, *The Map of Time.*"

In doing this he pulled off a sheet covering it, that I surmised was used for protecting the floor from sprinkles of paint when he was decorating. Nevertheless, it was effective at doing the job of concealing my eyes from the thing I was

wildly curious over.

When he pulled the covering off, I was met with the invention. If I was being honest, it wasn't what I expected. It was flat and circular, quite like a clock. But one of the principal differences, was that it was made to revolve around like a great wheel of time. Although it looked like both of these things it was really like none of them. The wheel moved on its own volition rather than by hands as one would see on a clock, or by the force of man that you would see in a wheel of fortune. The face of the wheel was divided into segments that had words on them rather than numbers. They had things on them such as growth, decay, economic turmoil, sexual immorality, etc.

"This is my machine. I think you might recognise some of the ideas I discussed in the letter I wrote to you, contained in a technical invention. The history of civilisation is nothing but a deterministic repetition of this cycle. The only thing that I need to do before I unleash this to the world, is to test it."

"Test it" I said, "And how might you go about doing this?"

"Good question. Well, according to my theory, we in the west are in the nighttime of civilisation. You only have to look at the world post the sexual revolution, and the rising economic issues, inflation, inequality, etc. According to my theory, this will naturally be followed by a season of violence. Wars will be waged on our civilisation as other powers spy that we have been weakened. They will destroy us, in which a new, more vibrant civilisation will have life breathed in it from the ashes."

"That is an interesting theory, though a bit vague. After all, war is a permanent state of man, and exactly what timeframe are you talking about?"

"Any moment, I would say certainly in the next six months."

I remember that meeting, and particularly Hawksridge's outlandish and cocksure claims. It was in the aftermath of our meeting that I voraciously checked the news. If anything, I wanted to see if my friend was correct. I looked for any sign of the impending war on western civilisation. Though the more I checked for these signs, ones of an imminent annihilation, the less I could see proof of this. In fact, one could hear news of a world that was heading in the opposite direction. Peace treaties were signed between hostile states, and trade deals cooked up. Certainly, we still had many of the problems Winston lamented over: poverty abounded, and not unrelatedly, families split apart like shoddy apparel.

I went to see Winston, if not six months to the day of his prediction, then around that date.

"What you said would naturally follow, hasn't. In fact, the opposite could be said to be happening," I said.

"Are you suggesting that rebirth won't consequently follow the heartbreak of apocalypse? A reconciliation won't happen after life disintegrates?" Winston paused for a while after saying this. "Are you suggesting that Natasha is gone forever, that love is never coming back?"

"I don't know, the world is unpredictable, but it looks that way," was the only honest way I could address the uncertainties plaguing my friend, and for that matter, life in general.

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Justin Wong is originally from Wembley, though is presently based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and literature since a young age. Previously,

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