

## THE OBSERVER EFFECT

by

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(A garage, made into a science lab. PETERSON is working on the finishing touches on a large contraption. Peterson makes final adjustment, stands up and talks into a recorder.)

PETERSON

And with that, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, at 9:42 pm... Lee Peterson will go down in history. System activated.

(Peterson presses a button)

PETERSON

Now the Field Modulator is active, and the pulses are steady. It's working. It's actually working!

(SMITH appears from apparently nowhere, wearing a gaudy shirt and hat. Smith speaks with a thick, thick midwestern accent)

SMITH

Well, ain't that a heck of thing?

PETERSON

Jesus, who the hell are you?

SMITH

Oh, hey. Don't let me disturb you or nothing. Keep on doing your thing.

PETERSON

How did you get in here?

SMITH

Hey, look, I'm just here to watch.

PETERSON

Watch what?

SMITH

Well, like you said. Today is when Lee Peterson goes down in history.

PETERSON

Yes, of course. But... How... Why?

SMITH

Don't you mind me one bit. Just, you know, keep going like I wasn't even here.

PETERSON

All right. Pulses continue to rise in expected... Wait. No. No. Who are you and how did you get in here?

SMITH

Oh, I'm just Smith. Just popped in to see this. See you make history, as it were.

PETERSON

Yeah, just... How do you know I'm making history here? How do you know my name?

SMITH

Well, golly. Everyone knows Lee Peterson, History's Greatest Monster.

PETERSON

History's what?

SMITH

History's Greatest Monster. Oh, my, that does sound frightfully bad to you, doesn't it? Shucks, just saying it out loud and seeing your face, well, heck, that just breaks my heart, don't you know.

PETERSON

What are you talking about?

SMITH

I'm talking about your little gizmo right there. Oh, it's cooking along nicely, ain't it? Real shame what's gonna happen.

PETERSON

History. Gonna happen? You're talking like you're...

SMITH

From the future, right.

PETERSON

What? You're a time-traveller?

SMITH

I prefer 'historical tourist' myself. I'm not so much traveling as projecting. I'm still home in my garage, just, seeing you unleash the apocalypse.

PETERSON

What? Wait a minute, wait a god-damned minute.

SMITH

Well, jiminy cricket, you don't have to talk like that now.

PETERSON

I unleash the apocalypse?

SMITH

Oh, my, yes. You're doing it right now, matter of fact. With your little project here.

PETERSON

No, this is... This is an energy source. Clean, powerful energy that will revolutionize the world.

SMITH

It's gonna change the world, sure, yeah. But pretty much just in the horrible ways.

(SMITH bends over and looks into the device.)

Oh, yeah, there's a whole lot of nothing going on in there.

PETERSON

Who ARE you, crazy person?

SMITH

Oh, like I said, just a historical tourist. Love to go to various great disasters and catastrophes and watch them as they happen. And, oh, mercy, this one really is a doozy.

PETERSON

OK, stop. I do not want to be history's greatest monster.

SMITH

Well, of course you don't. You're nice enough folk, after all. But, hey, what's done is done. Or, is doing, I suppose.

PETERSON

Right. It hasn't happened. I can stop it. We can stop it.

SMITH

Oh, I don't know about that.

PETERSON

Wouldn't that make you, you know, a hero? You helped stop the apocalypse.

SMITH

Yeah, but it's part of history. You're just an image of what happened in the past.

PETERSON

You are TALKING TO ME.

SMITH

Oh, that's true, I suppose. Course I am. You know, they said it couldn't be done, don't you know. They said the Temporal Viewer was a one way device. A research device only. Well, sure fire heck, I showed them.

PETERSON

Hey! Hey! Smith! Focus here! What went wrong? How can we stop it? Do I just turn it off?

SMITH

Oh, geez, I'd have to think about that. Well, see, you're little gizmo here is building up, and in a few minutes, it will burst out a wave of super potent radiation. You see, you've created a miniature black hole in here, and it gonna collapse on itself.

(Looks at the readings on the computer)

Oh, yeah, you see. Where your readings show nothing? Yeah, that void is the tiny event horizon of an even tinier black hole. It's actually pretty neat once you think about it.

PETERSON

So I should turn it off, right?

(Peterson hits a few switches)

There. That should do it, right?

SMITH

Oh, yeah, no. You see, the reaction is already self-sustaining.

PETERSON

What? That's impossible!

SMITH

Well, I think you miscalculated something there, buddy.

(Peterson goes to the monitors.)

PETERSON

No. No, there's no way this could happen.

SMITH

So, imagine what's about to happen. In a few moments, that tiny singularity is going to collapse, and release a pulse of radiation, the likes of which has never been seen before. You know, it's so strong that no one has been able to even attune a Temporal Viewer to this moment before? Too much interference. No one except me, I figured out how to break through it.

PETERSON

How is the reaction self-sustaining? The energy building is still greater than what it's generating. Am I missing something?

SMITH

But this pulse blasts out. Every bit of living matter in about 200 mile radius is destroyed instantly. Those are the lucky ones. Everything for more than a thousand miles from here dies slowly. Foodstuffs, of course, are useless. Yup, it takes decades to recover from this atrocity you're committing.

PETERSON

I'm not committing an atrocity! I'm trying to stop it!

SMITH

Golly, you're a good kid, you know? I'm gonna make a note of that. Folks thought you were some kinda crazed terrorist or something. Heck, that was the inspiration for inventing the Temporal Viewer, you know? To get at the truth. But once they couldn't crack through this moment, they all gave up. I kept at it, though, because, by golly, I knew there was more to the story.

(A building whine starts to come from the device.)

SMITH

Oh, there we go. Certainly no stopping it now.

PETERSON

Something is still feeding the reaction. It's the only explanation.

SMITH

You should be happy, though. I'll correct the record here. I'm sure you'll rest easier knowing that, eventually, you won't be considered a genocidal maniac. That should make your last few moments a little less frightening.

PETERSON

Those numbers don't even make sense. They can't be negative unless... There were tachyon particles in the mix. But how would there be tachyons bombarding the field?

SMITH

Only a few seconds to go.

PETERSON

You! Your Time Viewing Projection bullshit--

SMITH

There's no need to be vulgar.

PETERSON

It's bombarding everything in here with tachyons, isn't it?

SMITH

Well, sure as heck it is. Had to do something to crack through the radiation wall that was this moment in time, don't you know?

PETERSON

That's what's causing the build-up. That's what causes the apocalypse!

SMITH

Is it?

PETERSON

Look! This is all YOUR fault!

SMITH

(Going over to the monitors)

Well, darn it all to heck. Ain't that a whoopsie-daisy?

(The whine reaches its peak, and then there's a flashing burst of light. Then BLACKOUT.)