

# Paradox

Before I say anything, my first piece of advice to you is to forget anything you know about time travel. Completely wipe your mind of it. “Back to the Future?” Doesn’t exist. Alright, I suppose I should start from the top. If anyone ever finds these, you’ll probably remember the day of the incident. But if you don’t, or want to relive it for whatever messed-up reason, then listen closely. I’m Maverick Cassain, and I’m here to tell you about March 17, 2023: the day of the incident.

If you love yourself, don’t work in customer service. I worked as a cashier at a fast food place and hated every second of it. The clients were hissy, the management sucked, and I only worked there because the salary could pay my rent. Until I was 16, I didn’t even know that most kids didn’t need to pay rent. Their parents let them live there for free? It’s an unnatural thought. My manager was a lanky bald man called Bart and he was, to put it lightly, awful. He had a creepy, snaggletoothed smile that spread way too far on his face that he’d always make while saying “Now, Mr. Cassain, how do you speak to the customer?” whenever I messed up. He treated everyone like children and we all silently hoped that he’d mosey his way into the walk-in freezer and lock the door. It would’ve been better than the way he ended up going.

I was at my job the day of the incident, which isn’t really surprising.

If mass human extinction was going to start anywhere,

it would start at a fast food restaurant. The place was packed, the line to the drive-thru was longer than the run time of Titanic, and the electricity was going haywire. It had been a global issue for the last couple of weeks, and had done an excellent job proving how codependent humans are. Lights were going out, appliances were blowing fuses, the internet wasn't connecting. At first, these phases were only a few seconds at a time, but had been rapidly increasing in length day by day. People were starting to create conspiracy theories. It was like a murder mystery story- Google had died and everyone suspected everyone else of doing it. The phases on the day of the incident were particularly bad, all of the food in the restaurant had gone bad due to the freezer system blowing up. At the time, I thought it couldn't get much worse; people were yelling, and the lights had gone out, and I just wanted to leave.

So of course it got worse. So, so much worse.

The floor had started to shake under my feet, which was an instant red flag. Vermont doesn't get earthquakes, at least not the kinds that make the roof cave in. Which was exactly what was happening.

One of my coworkers screamed at the top of her lungs and ran for cover. Everyone else followed her lead and screamed, the volume making my ears ring. I leaped under a table next to a little boy right as the entire ceiling fell, raining ash and concrete and making my throat burn as I breathed in dust. For a moment, everything was silent except for people's labored breathing and the blood rushing to my ears. And from my ears. I could feel the warm

liquid running down my cheek. I hadn't even felt anything hit me, but as I raised a trembling hand to my face, I could feel a deep cut through my ear. Can't get any worse, I thought to myself. Some sage advice from me to you: don't think that.

Because that's when the robot showed up.

It couldn't have been more than four feet tall, but it looked like an Eldritch monster as it lumbered towards the rubble that was the restaurant. It looked like a metal box with a giant fish bowl spread across its back and massive, glowing yellow eyes. No one breathed as it made its way into the center of the restaurant and froze, its four legs locking into place. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man stumble towards it, his hand extended like he was about to How-to-Train-your-Dragon the robot. Through my blurry vision, I could see his face. Bart. He got close enough to put his hand on the robot's back before its legs bent and it pounced. Bart yelled out in fear as the robot pinned him down, one of its tentacle-like legs opening up to reveal a tunnel of blades.

I couldn't look. I got up from my hiding place and ran towards the only area that didn't collapse: the walk-in freezer. For once, I was thankful about the power issues. If the temperature wasn't acting up, I would've become a popsicle in minutes. My hands fumbled as I locked the heavy door behind me, and I could hear Bart's screams fade. I hated that man, but no one deserves that.

It was selfish, hiding alone in that freezer. The blood on my face dried, and sometimes the power would return and my fingers

would freeze. It was so quiet in there, and I do not recommend eating half-frozen meat from a defective icebox. I was told later that I'd been there for 4 days. By that point, I think I knew that no one else survived that attack, so when I heard the pounding at the door, I opened it, just enough to see outside. Not smart, I know. Luckily for me though, it wasn't a murderous robot- it was two girls, about my age. The shorter one gave me a relieved smile and glanced over to her friend, who glared at me like I had personally insulted her.

"Alright Freezer Burn, get out of there," Murder-Glare said, gesturing to me, and like a lost puppy with nowhere else to go, I followed the two strangers out of the fridge.