



DANELE J. ROTHARMEL

**TIME
SEARCH**

THE TIME COUNSELOR CHRONICLES #3

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Contact Information: titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com
Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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Dedication

For John, Kent, and Rob.
I'm extremely blessed to have you as brothers...
even if you are rascals!

Other Books in The Time Counselor Chronicles:

AVAILABLE NOW

Time Tsunami

Time Trap

Time Search

Information about TEMCO

Statement of Purpose:

The Temporal Counseling Program exists to train time-traveling cadets to intervene in the lives of troubled individuals before they commit suicide or embark on a career of crime.

Program Description:

All TEMCO cadets must go through a rigorous training program culminating in a field exam. Upon earning their license, a cadet may join TEMCO as a professor, a lab tech, or a professional time counselor.

Brief History of TEMCO:

Dan Ableman, the inventor of time travel, captured his first timewave during college. His friends, Peter Matthews and Laura Nelson, helped him perfect his design and set up TEMCO operations at National Science University in Washington D.C. Periodically, Poppa and Twinkles—Dan and his wife from forty-five years into the future—will arrive to help the TEMCO staff solve problems. Although TEMCO utilizes a Staging Platform to travel through time, the staff knows that Dan will eventually invent the portable Wave Trappers utilized by Poppa’s NewGen Crew.

Several years after TEMCO was established, Gil Montgomery, one of Dan’s student cadets, was sent back through time to dissipate a Time Tsunami. Gil managed to save Dan’s family from a serial killer, but her efforts almost cost her life. Later, she and Dan married and became field partners. Further information may be found in book one, *Time Tsunami*.

Four years after Gil saved TEMCO, she and Dan

had a child. While she was recovering, Drake Procerus—a student cadet—attacked TEMCO staff members and tried to steal a Wave Trapper. Although Poppa led everyone to safety, Drake wasn't caught. The leaders of TEMCO were taken to a safe house in Montana, and Crystal and Zeke were left behind to figure out Drake's agenda and true name. Further information may be found in book two, *Time Trap*.

**Character lists and glossaries are located at the end of the book.*

*The nights pass'd in sleepless care
The days of endless woe;
All that you taught my heart to bear
All that yourself will know
But this is fitting punishment
O my wrung heart, be thou content...
And feed upon...pain*

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "Revenge"

1

*June 9, 5:08 PM
Westbend Student Apartments, NSU Campus
Washington D.C.*

Heavy metal music blared through paper-thin walls. Knowing the noise from the apartment next door was drowning out his actions, Drake yanked open the door to Phoebe's curio cabinet. With an irritated flick of his finger, he sent her porcelain figurines crashing to the floor. He paused at a white rabbit. He remembered Phoebe's excitement when she'd bought it. She'd babbled on about it being the good luck charm for their field exam. Eyes narrowing, he threw the rabbit to the floor and ground it beneath his heel.

Bass boomed. A guitar solo shrieked. The music was so loud the pictures on the wall vibrated. Drake kicked at stuffing from shredded couch cushions on his way to Phoebe's kitchen where he broke every dish he could find. He moved to her refrigerator, dumping food into a revolting, multicolored mess on the floor.

After emptying her freezer, he ground his teeth and clenched his fists. There had to be a clue to Phoebe's location in her apartment. He just had to find it. Frustration mounted as he stomped to her bedroom, tearing posters from the walls as he went. In a matter of minutes, he'd torn her pristine bedroom to shreds,

scattering feathers from pillows and tossing the contents of her dresser onto the slashed mattress. When it became apparent that he wasn't going to find a clue to her location, he turned to pure vandalism—crushing and ripping anything that wasn't ruined in the first sweep.

When he tired of destruction, he went back to the living room. His steel-toed boots crunched glassy shards as he stole to the window and peeked through the blinds. He rolled his eyes. The black SUV was still parked across the street.

“Morons,” he muttered.

He backed away from the window with a sneer. Andrew Hamilton's agents obviously didn't realize that the steam tunnels beneath NSU led into the basement of the Westbend Student Apartments.

“You're all so stupid,” he hissed. “You deserve to be flattened like squirrels in the road.”

Next to the window, a plaque caught his attention. Its swooping gold letters proclaimed, *God Protects*. Rolling his eyes, Drake broke the plaque in half and lit a cigarette.

~*~

Across campus, Crystal Stuart gathered a stack of folders from her desk. “OK if I take these with me, Zeke? I do some of my best thinking around 2:00 AM.”

Zeke Masters grinned. “Have at it. This project needs all the brainpower it can get.”

Returning his smile, she added her purse, sweater, and a bag of apples on top of the folders. As the objects shifted, the bag of apples tried to roll. Crystal frowned. The stability of the pile was precarious at best.

“Do you need some help?” Zeke asked, stepping to her side.

“No, thanks. I have it,” she replied. “See you tomorrow. Say hello to Nicole for me.”

“You bet.”

Walking gingerly, Crystal weaved her way through the labyrinth-like Student Union basement. Since the second floor of Hawking Hall was a burned shell, she and Zeke had moved the Temporal Counseling Program’s headquarters across campus. The gloomy basement smelled like dirty gym socks, but it held a supercomputer they’d been able to jury-rig to the GAP computer. Even though they weren’t in the lab, they could still access most of their files.

Suddenly, the apples slid. Catching them, Crystal shivered and studied the shadows looming in the corridor. Trying to calm her breathing, she picked up her pace.

It had been a wild week since Drake traveled forward through time determined to murder the leaders of TEMCO. The stitches on the back of Crystal’s head seemed to prickle at the memory. She shuddered. That night still gave her nightmares. She’d been manning the lab when Drake came through the time portal. Drake was a TEMCO cadet, and she hadn’t realized he was the enemy stalking the staff until he’d attacked her. His blow knocked her out, and when she woke up, she found herself locked inside the file room surrounded by smoke. If Peter and Laura hadn’t found her, she would have burned alive.

Her stomach knotted at the memory. Although she wouldn’t admit it to Zeke, she wanted to take the files home to distract herself after the nightmares hit. She needed something to occupy her mind during the

predawn hours when sleep fled far away, and she was getting tired of watching late-night TV. After all, no matter how much a person loved Lucille Ball, only so many reruns of *I Love Lucy* could be watched before boredom induced a fit of the screaming meemies.

Crystal bit her lip. Perhaps the thing that scared her the most was the knowledge that Drake was still out there. With determination, she tried to push her troubled thoughts aside. She knew she was low on Drake's hit list, but she didn't want to be on the receiving end of his violence again.

With stubborn effort, Crystal began to whistle. She chuckled when she realized she was whistling "Zip-A-Dee-Do-Dah." She whistled the tune louder. After all, why shouldn't she? No matter what Drake had intended, she was alive and that made it a marvelous day. No matter what happened tomorrow, today was hers, and today was *going* to be happy. It *would* be happy if she had to grit her teeth and make it happy.

Still whistling, she climbed the steps to the back parking lot. Zeke had asked her not to park in view of the street. She agreed with his desire to keep Drake in ignorance of their whereabouts.

Reaching the exit, Crystal put her chin on the teetering stack of files and grabbed the doorknob. The files started to slide. Frantically, she caught them against her hip. Turning the knob, she tried to bump-push the door open with her foot. She was just going through when the files slid again. Spinning in her haste to catch them, she felt her ankle turning beneath her.

Papers flew in every direction as Crystal grabbed wildly at the door. Instead of breaking her fall, she only managed to pull the door shut as she crashed to the floor. She cried out in pain as her bruised head hit

the ground. All around her, papers swirled like snowflakes and apples tumbled their way down the stairs.

“Great.” Crystal groaned as the papers drifted to the floor. “Just great.”

She tried sitting up but was yanked back to the ground. Feeling her long, blonde hair, she realized that all but an inch of it was trapped beneath the closed door.

“Blast,” she muttered in exasperation, wincing as her probing fingers touched the bruise beneath her stitches.

She tried pulling her hair free, but it wouldn’t budge. She tried grabbing the doorknob, but her fingertips didn’t graze it. Her pinned hair was preventing easy movement. She strained and tried again. Her reach was two inches shy.

“Great. Great. *Great.*”

Crystal couldn’t decide whether to laugh or cry, so she settled on banging her fist against the floor. She couldn’t believe she was trapped by her hair. It was summer, and the campus was deserted. Nicole was picking Zeke up, so he’d pull his hoodie over his face and use the front entrance.

My chances of being discovered are...

Wrinkling her forehead, she did the mental math. Calculating the odds, and figuring in extenuating variables such as janitorial schedules and the secluded location of the back door, she knew it could take several hours for her predicament to be noticed. Even worse, whoever released her would have a great story to tell. Inevitably, the student body would end up with a new Klutzy Crystal joke to pass around.

She groaned.

Gritting her teeth, she lunged for the doorknob. Her pinned hair yanked her back to the floor. Crystal gave an exasperated huff and then took a deep, calming breath.

"I have oodles of brains," she muttered. "I'd better stop groaning and start putting them to use. There has to be a way to get this blasted door open before anyone sees me."

~*~

Straddling a chair, Drake grabbed Phoebe's television remote. Flipping to the news, he ground his cigarette out on an upturned coffee table.

"In local D.C. news," a brunette reporter said, "Dr. Lawrence Ember, an esteemed physician at Charles Shipley Medical Center, is still missing. Police believe Dr. Ember may have been abducted during last week's hospital disturbance."

Grinning, Drake stroked the knife in his pocket.

The reporter turned to a red-haired nurse whose eyes seemed too large for her face. Drake spat contemptuously. The nurse looked like an idiot. He doubted she even had a brain.

"Can you tell us about Dr. Ember?" the reporter asked.

The nurse nodded. "He was wonderful to work with. I really liked him."

"Do you have any idea why he may have been kidnapped?"

"I think it has to do with one of his patients—a strange girl who showed up out of the blue. There wasn't any paperwork on her."

"Is that unusual?"

The nurse rolled her eyes. "It's more than that—it's just plain weird."

Drake sat up straight. He turned the television's volume up, risking the noise.

"Can you tell us more about this patient?" the reporter asked.

"HIPPA prevents me from revealing her name, but I will say that her injuries were extreme. She was badly burned, and Dr. Ember wouldn't let me into her room. He acted like she was a closely guarded secret. If something bad happened to him, I'm sure it has to do with his mysterious patient. I hope he's OK. He really is—"

Drake switched off the television. A slow grin curled his lips. He needed answers about Phoebe, and now he knew where to get them. He wondered if the good doctor was still alive...

~*~

Pulling his sports car into a parking space, Marc Kerry stared at the back entrance of Student Union. Before he'd left for summer vacation, Twinkles had hinted that something was wrong at TEMCO, so he wasn't surprised when Zeke called and asked him to come home. Zeke had kept things hush-hush on the phone, but he'd sounded worried. That fact alone was enough to get Marc's attention.

Marc drummed his fingers against the steering wheel. The unique thing about time travel was the children met on assignment grew up and became a time surfer's contemporaries. Even though he'd counseled Zeke as a child, the adult-version of Zeke was now his supervisor. Zeke was also his friend, and

Marc was more than willing to put his summer plans on hold to lend a hand with whatever problem had cropped up on campus.

Stashing his keys in his pocket, Marc hurried toward the building. Zeke had been explicit that he was to park in the back lot. He didn't know why it mattered, but years of working at TEMCO had taught him that following instructions could be the difference between life and death.

As he reached the back entrance, he came to an abrupt halt. Underneath the door was a long expanse of blonde strands. The sight was unnatural enough to make his hair stand on end.

Suddenly, he heard a voice grumbling, "Blast. Blast. *Double Blast.*"

Marc blinked. Before his astonished gaze, a bare foot with rosy-pink toenails wavered behind the window in the door. As he watched, the foot turned and lowered itself onto the doorknob. The knob turned a little and then the foot lost its grip and fell back.

"Blast," the voice muttered again.

Marc felt a bubble of laughter rising in his chest.

A second foot rose to join the first. Together, the disembodied feet gripped the knob and tried to turn it.

"Come on," the voice chanted. "Just a little more."

The feet slipped and disappeared.

"*Sheesh,*" the voice spat.

Once again, the feet waved behind the window and tried to grip the knob.

Marc's lips twitched. It was Cris. It *had* to be Cris. It couldn't be anyone else. Even as the bubble of laughter expanded in his chest, his smile softened. Crystal was the weirdest girl on campus—maybe the weirdest girl on the planet—but he couldn't seem to

get her off his mind. At the lake, he'd tried to forget her smile, but he'd failed miserably. It seemed fitting that after arriving back in town, his first glimpse of her was an unconventional one. His grin widened as he watched her pink-painted toenails. Finally, he took pity and opened the door.

Crystal had obviously been balancing against the knob because the minute the door opened, her foot shot toward him. He caught it lightly in his hand.

"Hi, Cris." He grinned. "Problems?"

Crystal's face turned bright red. Staring up at him from her prone position, she pushed her owlish glasses further up on her nose. "Not r-really," she stuttered. "When did you arrive back in town?"

"Just now."

Marc realized he was still holding her foot. With twitching lips, he released his grip. Immediately, Crystal rolled to her knees and began gathering papers. He bent over to help just as she started to rise. Their heads cracked painfully together. Crystal fell back to the floor with a thump.

"Sorry about that," she mumbled with red cheeks, rubbing her head.

"My fault," Marc said. "I'll tell you what, you stay there, and I'll gather the apples on the stairs. That way we don't bump into each other again. This landing is pretty small."

With his help, Crystal soon had her belongings reassembled in her arms. When her stack teetered, she dropped her chin on top of it. He watched as she blew her bangs away from her forehead. As he stared at her, she motioned insistently at the door with her eyes and wagged her eyebrows.

A bubble of laughter threatened to choke him, but

he refused to let his mirth break free. Laughing would be fatal. Before he'd left campus, he'd managed to convince Crystal to be his friend—a miracle considering she'd been ignoring him for years—but if he laughed, she'd freeze up, and they'd be back to square one. Keeping a straight face, he opened the door for her.

"Thanks," she mumbled with her chin glued to the papers.

"Think nothing of it. Rescuing a damsel in distress is my good deed for the day."

Rosy color again flooded her face, reminding him of her pink-painted toenails. His smile widened. "It's good to see you, Cris."

Crystal's blush deepened. Her cheeks looked as if they had a severe case of sunburn. She started to speak but then simply nodded and walked out the door. He watched as she went to her car. Her midget-mobile was so tiny he could probably lift it with a finger. Its oddity fit Cris perfectly.

He rubbed his beard with the back of his hand. He was handsome enough that half the girls on campus had a crush on him, but he was sick of chasing after pretty faces. He was bored with swooning, gushing girls. He wanted to try his luck with a different type of woman. He cracked a grin. Crystal was the definition of different.

Turning toward the stairs, he saw Crystal's shoes and socks tumbled in a corner. Picking them up, he ran out the door. She was already pulling out of the parking lot. His bubble of laughter finally broke free. She was in her bare feet and probably didn't even know it. He wondered how long it'd take her to figure it out.

~*~

Drake drove slowly through the parking garage connected to Charles Shipley Medical Center. He narrowed his eyes. Unmarked police cars were cruising down the rows. He knew they were looking for him. He poked at his fake beard, making sure the adhesive was holding firm.

Being careful not to attract attention, he drove out of the garage and around the front of the hospital. He frowned. Police officers were stopping everyone who entered the building. His disguise might be good enough to tour the parking lot, but it would never get him through the front door.

Pulling around the back of the building, he drove past the service entrance and parked across the street. "There's always a solution if you look hard enough," he murmured.

~*~

Crystal drove down Science Avenue, chewing her lip and squirming.

"It just *had* to be Marc who found me," she muttered. "Sheesh! Out of all the people who could've opened that door and seen me looking like an utter idiot, it just *had* to be him."

Groaning, Crystal curled her bare toes around the accelerator.

"Heaven knows what he's thinking right now." She glared at her reflection in the rearview mirror. "Probably something along the lines of Klutzy Crystal strikes again."

Fidgeting, she pulled up to a stop sign.

“So much for appearing suave and sophisticated when you saw him again,” she spat. “So much for starting a causal conversation that would end in a dinner invitation.”

She turned the corner.

“You just had to blow it, didn’t you? There’s nothing sophisticated about bare feet and doorknobs. If you want people to stop seeing you as the campus joke, then stop acting like such a freak.”

Her hands tightened like claws around the steering wheel. Thinking of the way he’d held her foot, she blushed.

“You know you looked like an addlebrained moron, don’t you?” she asked her reflection. “And you probably gave him a concussion when you bumped heads with him.”

Her cheeks burned. Glancing back at the road, she sighed. She knew she’d left her shoes behind, but there was no way on earth she was going back for them. She needed to regain her composure before running into Marc again. He already thought she was a klutz—she’d rather go barefoot until her toes fell off than let him think she was a forgetful dingbat, too.

She gave a halfhearted attempt at whistling “Zip-A-Dee-Do-Dah” but gave up in disgust.

Rolling her eyes expressively at her reflection, she grumbled, “Whistling may help you fend off your fear of a murderer, but it’s absolutely *worthless* when it comes to fending off the embarrassment that an extremely cute guy has just caught you trying to open a door with your toes.” She scrunched down in her seat, trying to disappear. “The only bright spot in this whole stupid situation is that at least I have freshly painted toenails.”

~*~

With a gathering smile, Drake watched as a Jefko Food truck backed up to the hospital's service entrance. The deliveryman's red jacket and cap seemed to glow as he hopped from the cab.

In his car, Drake narrowed his eyes and waited. When the delivery was complete, Drake merged into traffic behind the truck.

"Patience wins. Slowly wins. Never-but-ever-but-slowly wins," he chanted in a singsong voice.

The truck turned a corner. Drake followed. All he had to do was find an opportunity to get the driver alone. The red jacket would look good on him. Looking in the rearview mirror, he saw his eyes dilating. They took on a silver gleam.

"I hope the deliveryman puts up a fight," he murmured. "I need to work off some steam."