A rogue time agent is wreaking havoc with the time scientists' calculations. Alexis Jackson's mission? Go back in time. Can she find the culprit before it's too late?

He's Gone Rogue!

by Anne W. Phillips

illustrated by Jason Juta

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Fiction: Science Fiction

Book 187  Level Z

3085 Total Running Words
Time Travel

Is time travel possible in our universe?

Science fiction writers wonder about that question and write stories about time travelers.

Scientists have argued about whether or not time travel would break the laws of physics that our world runs by. A famous physicist, Stephen Hawking, once asked, “If time travel is possible, then where are the tourists from the future?” Later, though, he said that time travel might be possible.

If we could travel through time, all sorts of problems might arise. Suppose you went back in time and accidentally caused the death of one of your parents before you were born. Then you wouldn’t be born in your own time, so you couldn’t go back in time and cause the death of your parent. But then you would be born, so you could go back in time. . . . You see? Things get complicated very fast.

The Butterfly Effect

Author: Anne W. Phillips

Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention Books
Copyright © 2015 by Irene C. Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell, and Heinemann

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be mailed to the Permissions Department at Heinemann, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801.


Design and Production by Six Red Marbles

Credit
Illustrations: Jason Juta

Printed in China
THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

by Anne W. Phillips
illustrated by Jason Juta
I wake up hungry in a room I’ve never seen before. The room looks like any ordinary room, but it’s not. It’s the portal between the time I’m in now, 2020, and my own time, forty years in the future. I’m Alexis Jackson, time agent, and this is my initial assignment.

I’m a member of the Butterfly Squad. You may have heard how a butterfly flapping its wings in China can cause a hurricane in Australia—how one tiny change in the past can make a giant alteration to the future. The Butterfly Squad is made up of agents who travel back in time to make those tiny changes.
Jonathan Bleeker disappeared while on assignment in this time, the year 2020. No one knows if he needs rescuing or if he's dead, but something's playing havoc with the scientists' calculations of planned changes for our own time. It could be a result of Bleeker's actions. They suspect he's no longer following instructions and has gone rogue.

When I find Bleeker, my orders are clear. Don't try to capture him. Don't even talk to him. Just key in the emergency code on the chronometer I wear on my wrist. Security agents are on standby. They will transit through time within seconds to deal with him.

Don’t ask me how it works. Our time scientists are the experts. They calculate what changes to make in the past so that our own time is better. All I know is, time agents have to execute the scientists’ instructions exactly. The changes we make must be controlled and purposeful.

The Butterfly Squad is my family, especially since no one in my own family survived the Global Plague. I work hard to do my best. And I guess I’ve proved my dedication. Some of the more experienced agents got passed over when I was handed this very challenging assignment for my first mission. They weren’t happy, and I’m determined to show them all I’ve got what it takes.

My mission? To find Agent Bleeker.
Jonathan Bleeker disappeared while on assignment in this time, the year 2020. No one knows if he needs rescuing or if he’s dead, but something’s playing havoc with the scientists’ calculations of planned changes for our own time. It could be a result of Bleeker’s actions. They suspect he’s no longer following instructions and has gone rogue.

When I find Bleeker, my orders are clear. Don’t try to capture him. Don’t even talk to him. Just key in the emergency code on the chronometer I wear on my wrist. Security agents are on standby. They will transit through time within seconds to deal with him.
I stagger to the window and look out. No matter what you learn in training, no matter how many holo-casts you watch, nothing prepares you for the authentic, unimaginable past.

Cars rush by below. Horns honk. The smell of gasoline exhaust fumes comes in the window. And the people! So many people all crowded together, all rushing somewhere. There haven't been this many human beings in one place since the Global Plague. How do you find one man among thousands?

I don’t know.

But I do know I’d better get a move on. Three days is all I’ve got.

I check the chronometer on my wrist. It’s my link to my own time, and I’m relieved to see it’s still working.
Then I pat my shirt pocket. I don’t know if feeling the three small vapo-tubes hidden in a seam there makes me feel better or worse. They look like harmless lip gloss tubes. But one squeeze in just the right spot and a vapo-tube emits a beam so strong, so concentrated, that it vaporizes anything—or anyone—it hits. We all carry them, in case of dire emergency. I never want to use mine.

I swallow one of the food pills in my pocket and stumble down the steps. Other travelers warned me about how famished I’d feel. The pill doesn’t help the hunger, but it has all the nourishment I need in it. Agents don’t eat or drink anything in the past. We talk as little as possible. Leave no trace, that’s our creed. No uncontrolled flap of a butterfly wing.
Downstairs, a pungent smell smacks me in the face. Nobody told me the portal room is over a coffee shop. We haven’t had coffee in our time for years, since the plague wiped out the coffee workers and trees. Nobody knows what caused it. One day, we had coffee. A couple of days later, there were dead trees and dying workers. And then dead people everywhere, all over the world.

Even if I can’t drink the coffee, there’s no harm in smelling it. I hover near the counter, inhaling.

“Ethiopian is the special of the day,” says the person behind the counter. Her name tag reads Amy. She has a winning smile.

I smile back, but I don’t say anything. I don’t buy anything either, even though I have the currency that they use in this time in my pockets. I turn away, still breathing in the dark, spicy scent of the coffee.
Then I think I see him.

Agent Bleeker. Could it be this easy? I ask myself.

They coded his picture into my chronometer, but I don’t need to access it. I’ve already memorized his face.

He’s across the street, walking toward the bus stop. I elbow my way through the people on the sidewalk and dash into the street.

Horns blast. A car screeches to a stop inches from me.

Someone shouts, “Watch where you’re going!”

I run the rest of the way to the curb, shaking. If that car had hit me, who knows what the butterfly effect would have been? I have to be more careful.
The person I thought was Bleeker has vanished, but I've got the list of locations where they tracked him until his chronometer stopped sending data.

I start at the library, a huge brick building filled with paper books. I could tell these people that in my time, a whole library has the dimensions of a matchbook, but I don’t. I watch people reading. It’s shocking how they flip through books and newspapers, fingerling the pages, oblivious to the viruses that can be transmitted so easily from paper to person.

Then I remember. They haven’t had the plague yet. And perhaps, if the Butterfly Squad can prevent the plague, they never will. My biggest dream is to be chosen to be part of that mission. But I have to prove myself. I have to get Bleeker first.
After a few hours, I head to the history museum. Bleeker spent time there, too. It’s so odd; the things people are actually using in the time I’m standing in, right here and now—cell phones and computers—are already vestiges of history. They’re on display in virtual museums back in my home time.

No sign of Bleeker.

Bleeker’s chronometer also tracked him to a shopping mall, so I go there next. Virtual stores are so much cleaner. Safer. But watching people—choosing clothes, talking to each other, eating together, laughing, arguing—is fascinating. It’s hard to keep focused on my search.

By the time the stores are closing, too. I don’t want to take time out to sleep, but I know I have to. Time travel is hard on the body’s systems. So I head back to the simple room above the coffee shop, the portal that in an instant could teleport me back to my own time. Only two days left.
The next day, I make my rounds. First, a cup of coffee to smell. "Colombian is on special today," Amy says. This time, I buy a cup and hold it close. It smells like honey and almonds, so rich I almost forget how hungry I am. Then off to the library, museum, and mall. People, people, people. I wasn't counting on having to find him in all these throngs. It's so frustrating. I can't ask people about Bleeker or show his picture around. That butterfly flap thing. When everything closes, I return to the room to sleep. If you can call it sleep. I keep dreaming I'm falling, plunging, descending through forty years, and I can't get back to my own time.
The next day, I make my rounds. First, a cup of coffee to smell. “Colombian is on special today,” Amy says.

This time, I buy a cup and hold it close. It smells like honey and almonds, so rich I almost forget how hungry I am.

Then off to the library, museum, and mall. People, people, people. I wasn’t counting on having to find him in all these throngs. It’s so frustrating. I can’t ask people about Bleeker or show his picture around. That butterfly flap thing.

When everything closes, I return to the room to sleep. If you can call it sleep. I keep dreaming I’m falling, plunging, descending through forty years, and I can’t get back to my own time.
Day three. My last full day. Amy recommends Guatemalan coffee. I inhale the smell of smoke and chocolate. Amy has such a nice smile.

I make my rounds. Library. Museum. Mall. Streets. But all the time I walk and search, my dream haunts me. What would it be like, to be perpetually caught here? What is Bleeker thinking?

I know I’m not thinking well. Time lag. Hunger. Bad dreams. By mid-afternoon, I’m so fatigued I can taste my need for sleep. Our trainers warned us about this stage of difficult missions. *Kick out of the routine*, they taught us. *Listen to your subconscious*. I decide to sleep for a bit. I’ll go out tonight. My last night. One more chance.
On my way to my room, I duck into the coffee shop. Amy is still here, sweeping. There’s a new special now—Sumatran, which smells like vanilla. I buy a cup, breathe in the fragrance, and nod to her. I’m about to leave and retreat to my room, when she surprises me.

“So now you’re a regular,” she says. I must look confused, so she clarifies. “Every morning for three days, and another visit this afternoon.”

I smile, but can see it isn’t enough. “Good coffee,” I say. My voice is hoarse, I’m that unused to talking.

“Isn’t it great?” Amy says. “I love coffee. Not just selling it. I mean, my whole family is into coffee. In fact, my grandparents actually have a coffee plantation and my fiancé and I are making plans to join them there and help them out. Can you believe it? Soon I’ll be right where it all begins, harvesting the beans!”
My smile freezes on my face. My mind churns, calculating furiously. If Amy gets to the coffee plantation, how long will she stay? A year or two? Ten? Twenty? Longer than that and she'll be one of the first victims of the plague. Even if she doesn't stay, she might not survive. So many people didn't—people as amiable and blameless as Amy. My own parents. My little brother, who never had a chance to grow up.

I have to find Bleeker. Only then can I be sure I'll go on the next mission, and the next, and maybe, eventually, make the change that prevents the plague altogether.
My smile freezes on my face. My mind churns, calculating furiously. If Amy gets to the coffee plantation, how long will she stay? A year or two? Ten? Twenty? Longer than that and she’ll be one of the first victims of the plague. Even if she doesn’t stay, she might not survive. So many people didn’t—people as amiable and blameless as Amy. My own parents. My little brother, who never had a chance to grow up.

I have to find Bleeker. Only then can I be sure I’ll go on the next mission, and the next, and maybe, eventually, make the change that prevents the plague altogether.
I get away as best I can. I mumble, “That sounds great. But I just remembered…something.” Amy probably thinks I’m crazy. I feel crazy. I can’t even think about sleeping now. As I wander for hours through the streets, I feel as though someone is watching me. But who would notice me in this crowd?

And then I see Bleeker again. This time I’m sure. I know him. Our eyes meet in a shop window’s reflection. He sees me seeing him, sees me recognize him. He bolts.
I run, too. I can’t let him get away. Suddenly, I have to catch him. I have to talk to him. I have to tell him about Amy. What if his random effects on this time keep the scientists from ever solving the puzzle and stopping the plague?

I’ll contact the agents later. First, I have to try to reason with him. Why is he staying here in this time? He was well trained, just like me. Something is wrong. I need to know what is going on.

Down the street he sprints, pushing people out of his way. He turns down an alley. I’m close behind, but when I get to the alley, he’s gone.

Then I see a fire escape, still vibrating.
I race toward it....

BAM!

Pain explodes in my head.
Everything goes black.
I hear voices.

“She’s got pills,” says one voice.

“That fancy watch should bring us some money, too,” says another voice. Someone tugs at my chronometer.

Forget *Leave no trace*. I need that chronometer to get back to my own time. I come up from the alley so fast stars spin in front of me. My training kicks in. Kick! Punch! Roll and throw!

They’re both down and out before they know what hit them.

And then I see that they’re just kids, really. Street kids. Two or three years younger than Amy. I pry my food pills out of the one kid’s hand. Only then do I remember the vapo-tubes. Hastily, I pat my pocket. Still there. The havoc they could have caused! I let out a shaky breath and as I refasten my chronometer on my wrist, I glance at the countdown clock. Less than twelve hours until I return to the future. A failure. No Bleeker. And who knows what changes this mugging might trigger?
At least I can make sure they recover without further incident. Their pulses are good. I drag them behind a trash bin, prop them against a wall, and stand guard until they begin to stir.

It’s dark by the time they start to come back to consciousness. I slip out of the alley. All night I walk the neighborhood. Bleeker’s here. I know he is. But he knows I’m here, too. And now I know he doesn’t want to get caught.

With one hour to go before I return to the portal, I slip into the coffee shop. No Amy. Is her shift over? Or has she already left? Gone to her dream and her doom?

I’m sitting at a table, breathing in my last cup of coffee—Bolivian—when someone sits down across from me. I look up.

Into Agent Bleeker’s eyes. He looks pointedly down at his right hand, and I follow his gaze. His fist is closed. He rolls his hand and opens the fist slightly. On his palm rests a vapo-tube.
I could fling myself sideways, flip the table, take him down, punch in the code.
But first, I realize, I need to talk. Maybe I can get him to give himself up.
“You know Amy, right?” I say.
“Sweet kid,” Bleeker says. “Great smile.”
“You know where she’s going?” I ask. “Maybe even tomorrow?”
Bleeker rubs his face. He’s at least as tired as I am. “That girl’s got dreams,” he says.
“They’re going to turn into nightmares,” I say, “if you don’t turn yourself in.”
“You think the fact that I stayed here triggered the plague?”
I shrug. “You’ve gone rogue.”
“I’ve gone rogue,” Bleeker says, “but it’s not like you think.”
Suddenly I remember. I wasn’t sent here to think. I was sent here to do. Slowly, slowly, I move my right hand toward my chronometer.
Bleeker flips the vapo-tube from the palm of his hand to his fingers, pointing it at me. One quick squeeze, one small POP!, and I’m dead…gone…vaporized.

“Take off your chronometer,” he says. “Slowly. Put it on the table.”

I do.

“Didn’t you ever wonder why they sent a raw agent on this assignment?” he asks.

“I was top of my class,” I say.

“Congratulations,” Bleeker says, but not like he means it. “So you’re quick and strong. And you follow the time scientists’ instructions without question.”

“Of course,” I say. “Because they know what they’re doing.” I lean forward, in case he doesn’t understand. “Listen. Think of Amy. If we get this right, we can prevent the plague. There she’ll be, forty years from now, still running that coffee plantation, still with that great smile, maybe even smiling at her own grandchildren.”
“Or maybe she gets hit by a bus tomorrow,” Bleeker says. “Who knows? Not the time scientists, that’s for sure.” Now Bleeker leans forward, like he has something I have to hear. “Look, kid. I saw what you did for the punks who mugged you. You watched over them until you knew they could take care of themselves. You care about people.…”

I interrupt him. “Of course I care. That’s why we have to do what the time guys say. You’ve got to come back. If we do things right, we’ll prevent the plague.…”

Bleeker holds up his hand to stop me—the hand without the tube. “That plague didn’t just happen. We caused it.”

“Huh?”

Bleeker rubs his face—his face pale. He’s not just tired. He’s exhausted. “It took me a while to figure it out, but I’m the agent who made the change that caused the Global Plague,” he says. “Clever me, huh? But here’s the kicker—I did it by following our time scientists’ instructions without question.”
I stare. “I don’t believe you,” I say.

“I can’t blame you,” he says. “I wouldn’t have believed me either. It was a tiny change. A mere tweak. A few new, ‘improved’ coffee beans…” He wipes his hand over his eyes. “They keep saying they’re going to fix their mistake,” he says. “Over and over, they sent me back to redo that one false step. It never worked. I believe they’re just guessing now. Guessing with the future of the world.”

My thoughts spin. My family, all those people, dead because the scientists made a miscalculation?

“I’ve been watching you,” Bleeker says. “I thought maybe you’d understand why I can’t go back. If I can’t stop the time scientists from making more changes, at least I can mess up their calculations. Be my own butterfly effect.”

I lift the coffee to my face, breathe deep. Orange and milky chocolate. Maybe the smell will clear my head.

“What do you want from me?” I ask.
“Tell them you couldn’t find me,” he says. “Tell them I’m dead. Or you can just vaporize me. If I go back, I’m a dead man anyway. With what I know, they’ll never let me live.”

He flips the vapo-tube onto the table. Rolls it toward me. I grab it just as it’s about to roll off the tabletop.

My mind is racing. I could transmit the code on my chronometer. Salvage my career as an agent. Make more trips through time. I could transform the future for the good.

Or for bad. Really, really bad. If the Butterfly Squad never existed, maybe my family would still be alive.

I hold the tube with my thumb and index finger. I aim it at Bleeker’s chest.


POP!
Bleeker opens his eyes. We both stare at a blackened spot on the tabletop. My chronometer is dead...gone...vaporized.

“They’ll send others,” I say. “We’ll need to move to a new city.”

He nods, stunned.

People are staring our way. I wonder how many have seen what just happened.

“We need to go,” he says.

I grab my cup of coffee, chug it down.

Even cold, it tastes fantastic.

We leave the coffee shop behind and disappear into the crowd.
TIME TRAVEL

Is time travel possible in our universe?

Science fiction writers wonder about that question and write stories about time travelers. Scientists have argued about whether or not time travel would break the laws of physics that our world runs by. A famous physicist, Stephen Hawking, once asked, “If time travel is possible, then where are the tourists from the future?” Later, though, he said that time travel might be possible.

If we could travel through time, all sorts of problems might arise. Suppose you went back in time and accidentally caused the death of one of your parents before you were born. Then you wouldn’t be born in your own time, so you couldn’t go back in time and cause the death of your parent. But then you would be born, so you could go back in time…. You see? Things get complicated very fast.
He’s Gone Rogue!

A rogue time agent is wreaking havoc with the time scientists’ calculations. Alexis Jackson’s mission? Go back in time. Can she find the culprit before it’s too late?