

Two scenes from *The Sleep Jumper* by Bob Miller

From 'The Travelers' chapter:

"Hey Doctor Whiteford, all this equipment is to monitor comatose victims, right?"

"Well, not really. Let me clarify: our clients are in a coma-like state, but it is an induced and controlled coma. And they are not 'victims', they are clients," he said, not really clarifying anything.

"Why do you call them travelers?"

He flipped a switch and four black and white TV monitors flickered to life. Each monitor showed what looked like a bulky casket with tubes and wires attached to it. The caskets appeared to be metal, and each one had a curved window on the top, that was frosted over so that it was impossible to see the interior from this camera angle.

"Have you ever read H.G. Well's *The Time Machine*?" Whiteford asked.

"Yes, why? Are these guys time-travelers?" I asked with a smirk.

He didn't smile, instead he answered seriously. "Not in the way that you're thinking. A machine that can transport someone forward and backward in time is just a myth, of course, like the soul. Time doesn't 'flow' forward or backward. Days pass. That's it." He paused to see if I was understanding him.

I said nothing, just nodded.

"And if humanity were ever to figure out a way to travel back in time, I don't think that it would be as effortless as flipping a switch on a machine. It's a rule of life that anything that promises to deliver phenomenal rewards, will also come at an extravagant price."

"That sounds like a fact of life to me," I said. And I believed it too. "So, you call these guys travelers because why?"

"Our travelers reside in these Cryo-Chambers," Whiteford said. "And like you and I, they are traveling into the future, one day at a time. But there are two major

differences between them and us. First, they are unconscious, so it will seem to them as if no time has passed."

"Like when you go to sleep at night."

"Even better than that. Most people are restless at night and don't remain in deep sleep all night. So they are aware that time is passing. And, even if people sleep very soundly during a short nap, they may awake and say, 'I feel like I've been asleep for hours.' The body has a time sense. But cryo-sleep is like blinking. There is absolutely no sense of the passage of time."

"You sound like you've experienced it?" I suggested.

"And second, they don't age," said Whiteford, ignoring my implied question.

"They don't age?" I was doubtful about that.

"Of course not. It wouldn't do much good to go to sleep for fifty years if you were fifty years older when you awake, would it?"

"No, but how could someone not age at all? That's not possible is it?"

"Not yet." I frowned at the implication. He continued, "They age very, very slowly. Their bodily functions have been slowed considerably by the cold temperatures and the hibernation-drugs that are administered on a regular basis. So when they awake, they will be virtually the same age as when they went to sleep."

"And when was that?" I asked.

"Follow me," ordered Whiteford.

From 'Day 4' chapter:

I stood in an amazed stupor staring at these archaic mechanisms. This was technology from the 40s. It may have been state-of-the-art at the time, but now it resembled a pile of junk cobbled together with rivets, screws and old lawn mower parts. I didn't know what awed me the most: the bravery of these four poor souls to voluntarily insert their bodies into these overgrown tuna cans, or the salesmanship of Noell Whiteford to convince them to do so. They must have been desperate. I

wondered if these Travelers had life-threatening diseases or were just dying of old age.

Time to get a close look.

I walked to the nearest pod and leaned over it to peer into the curved glass window. It was frosted over. I rubbed at it with my glove. The image was obscured, but it seemed to be a gaunt, grey face. I had rubbed off the external frost, but there was a layer of frost attached to the inside of the glass. Although I hadn't been able to discern the full features of a face, I had seen enough of it to give me the creeps. I imagined that I might have a similar reaction if I'd found a frozen 80-year old, wrinkled, naked body in my deep freeze.

The dial was ticking down on my air tank, so I determined to do whatever maintenance appeared to be necessary.

As I surveyed the four tin cans of 1940s technology, one of the hoses attached to pod 3, popped off with the sound of an engine backfiring, and began flailing about wildly, propelled by the pressure of released gas, which hissed and sprayed freely into the room.

As quickly as my cumbersome suit allowed, I shuffled to the pod and tried snatching the neck of the jumping hose.

I missed on the first two attempts.

On the third attempt I had success and tried to force the hose back onto the connector. It was as easy as screwing a watering hose onto a faucet while the water spewed from it at great pressure.

When I finally got it fit back onto the small tube extending from the pod, I held it in place to examine what had caused this. There was supposed to be a pressure clamp holding the hose in place, but it was missing. As I stood holding the hose, I looked around the room to see where it had landed. I could feel the pressure trying to force the hose off the pod, so I didn't want to let go in order to search for the missing part. I scanned the floor with a frenzied panic, as I considered that the occupant of this pod could die if I don't attach this hose. I didn't know what type of gas was being pumped into the old pod, but I knew it was important.

I spotted the errant hose clamp on the floor about two feet from me.

I couldn't reach it with my arm, so I extended my leg until my booted foot rested directly above it. I eased the boot onto the clamp and dragged it along the floor toward me with a scraping sound. It was an inch from my foot, but I couldn't reach it with my left hand without removing my right hand's tight grasp of the hose.

What could I do?

Move quickly, Nick.

I leaned over, stretching my left arm as far as possible. The hose clamp was only three inches from my gloved hand. I released my right-hand grip on the hose, which instantly popped off and sprayed and hissed wildly again. In a second, I had nabbed the clamp and then stood again and successfully captured the rapidly snaking hose.

I pressed the hose back onto the connector and attached the clamp, which was too loose. I squeezed the clamp as tight as I could with my gloved hand. I cautiously released my grip to see the result. It held firm. But, certain that it needed more tightening, I walked to the workbench to retrieve a pair of pliers, which I used to force the clamp firmly onto the connector.

I sighed in relief.

Taking a step back to evaluate the damage, I discovered that there was liquid now dripping from below pod 3. I touched it with my gloved hand, and then, ridiculously, tried to smell it— old habits from repairing the T-Bird.

It appeared to be water. Or accumulated condensation

The sudden realization that this was dripping condensation filled me with fear.

I stepped around the pod to examine the curved glass window above the Traveler's face. It was completely clear, the leaking gas having caused a rise in temperature in the pod. I leaned over the window to get a closer look on the health of the Traveler.

The face that stared back at me could hardly be called human, anymore. The gaunt, lifeless head was nothing more than a skull with skin pulled down into every

crevice. The eyeballs looked like deflated balloons. The mouth was open revealing a shriveled tongue and aged, yellow teeth, two of which were capped with gold. The dried skin which clung to the bones beneath was cracked and flaking. Due to the frosty interior melting and dripping onto the lifeless Traveler, his face had a wet glistening appearance which only added to the grotesque visage.

In my medical opinion, this guy is dead.

I felt no guilt, because I wasn't the one who killed him. He has been dead for a decade, I guessed. The implications of this discovery overwhelmed me with questions.

The Sleep Jumper is book #4 in *The Chrysalis Chronology, Int.* pentalogy by Bob Miller.

www.ChrysalisChronology.com