

The 25th Hour
By Keith B. Darrell
Amber Book Company LLC
www.AmberBookCompany.com
U.S.A.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2014913765
The 25th Hour / Keith B. Darrell

Address inquiries regarding foreign rights, translation rights, audio rights, film rights, television rights, or merchandising licensing to: *info@AmberBookCompany.com*.

Copyright © 2015 Keith B. Darrell. No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, by any process or technique — except for a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine, newspaper, or on the World Wide Web — without the express written consent of the publisher. All rights reserved. All rights too.

First edition published 2015. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

All persons, places, and organizations in this book — except those clearly in the public domain — are fictitious, and any resemblance that may seem to exist to actual persons, places, or organizations living, dead, or defunct is purely coincidental.

14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-935971-14-6

First Edition • July 2015

This book is printed on acid-free paper. Your fingers are safe. E-book edition emits deadly radiation; you're screwed.

Prologue

Tempus Fugitive

THE TAP ON HIS SHOULDER made Mackenzie Mortimer's heart jump. He turned his head from the column he had been peeking out from behind, and relaxed at the sight of his best friend, Marlene Prentice.

Marlene giggled. "Did you think I was Tucker?"

"I'm not afraid of Tucker Bryant."

Mackenzie's bravado failed to impress Marlene. "I'd be scared of any bully gunning for me on the last day of school before winter break."

Mackenzie peered beyond the pillar at the junior high's football field, a vast, open prairie separating him from the shortest route home. "He said he'd be waiting for me after school. I bet he's crouched out there somewhere, watching... waiting for me to cross the field." The 13-year-old boy chuckled. "He'll be waiting till dinnertime. I'm taking the long way home."

The 25th Hour

Marlene frowned, causing her freckles to stretch. "Past Warehouse Row? Are you sure you want to go home that way? A lot of drunks and vagrants hang out there."

Mackenzie shrugged. "It's the last day of school. All I have to do is get home and I'll have the whole break without having to look at Bryant's ugly face."

"Wish I could come with you, Mac, but I've got to get home and do my chores or my mom will ground me for the whole break. But after I finish, I could go for some hoops before dinner. Want to meet at the basketball court at five?"

"Sure." Mackenzie smiled at the 13-year-old tomboy and dashed off, away from the field.

The smell of sweat and urine assailed Mackenzie's nose. The street was littered with old newspapers and beer cans. Warehouse Row was not the most attractive part of town, but there was no one there to bother you. *Nothing but dreary windowless buildings propped up by homeless men and women lost in their own worlds*, the boy thought. He pretended they were crouching gargoyles perched on the battlement of a great castle, and he was a knight on a quest. He tugged a broken broom handle from a dumpster he passed. *A heroic knight with a mighty sword, like Excalibur*. Mackenzie waved the ersatz wooden sword, slicing through the air. He would need a squire, of course. He had no doubt Marlene would serve as his faithful sidekick. His quest would take them through forests and strange lands, like Warehouse Row, and along the way he would defeat the Black Knight, Sir Bryant, and win the heart of the beautiful Princess Vanessa. Mackenzie closed his eyes and envisioned Vanessa Carlyle seated three desks from him in English class. *Beautiful*

Tempus Fugitive

golden hair that flowed like strands of honey, blue eyes that sparkled even in the glow of the classroom's fluorescent lights, and—

The tremor shook Mackenzie from his reverie. He gazed up to see the space ahead of him billow and fold, as if he were viewing it through a smoky haze. A figure hurtled toward him, seemingly coming from nowhere, and landed at his feet.

Mackenzie dropped the broomstick in surprise. "Are you all right, mister?"

A wrinkled, liver-spotted hand pushed against the pavement, propelling the figure to his feet. He stood, studying Mackenzie's face. The man's voice was raspy and he spoke in gasps. "This is the right date, the right place. It's got to be you. Tell me your name."

"Mackenzie Mortimer." He stared at the ancient man, who appeared to grow even older as they spoke, fascinated and repulsed at the same time. "But everyone calls me Mac. Except my mother. She calls me Mackenzie, especially when she's mad at me." He knew he was rambling, but he didn't know what else to say. He considered running away, but the man was too old to be a threat to him and looked like he needed help.

"Your mother," the man repeated. "She mustn't find out about the watch. If she does, the consequences will be tragic. I've seen it. In the future. I couldn't bear to watch her die again."

Mackenzie backed away. "I think I should be going." He noticed the man tremble. "Do you want me to call 9-1-1 to send an ambulance? You don't look too good."

The 25th Hour

The old man pulled a key from his pocket and thrust it into Mackenzie's palm. "I'm out of time. You'll know when to use it."

Mackenzie studied the ornate metal key. He had never seen one quite like it. The iron key was black and heavy, with an intricate design forged into the key head. "Look, mister..."

The man trembled again. His body shook, vibrating for several seconds before crumbling into dust.

Mackenzie stared in horror at the empty clothes strewn at his feet where the old man had stood. His hand squeezed the sturdy key until his fingers turned white. He ran past the old man's remains, down Warehouse Row, not looking back. He ran faster than if Tucker Bryant were chasing him. Mackenzie would have preferred being chased by the bully. He was afraid of Tucker, but that was a different kind of fear. Mackenzie had never seen a man die before. And he was fairly certain no one had ever seen a man die like that.

Chapter One

Time Waits for No Man

“**M**ACKENZIE MORTIMER! COME HERE THIS instant.” A dejected figure turned from the front yard gate and trudged back to the house, tossing his baseball glove and ball on the porch. “Aw, Mom. The guys are waiting for me. It’s the last day of vacation.”

“Don’t ‘Aw, Mom’ me, young man. It is the last day of vacation — and you’ve been promising to clean out the garage every day since the school break began. Your game can wait until you’ve cleared the junk from the garage.”

Mackenzie gazed at the piles of boxes, sacks, and trunks stored in the Mortimer garage. “But Mom, that’ll take forever.”

“Then, you’d best get started, because you only have until I get back home.” Mrs. Mortimer gave him a peck on the forehead, clicked her remote car lock, and climbed behind the wheel.

The 25th Hour

Mackenzie watched his mother drive off. After her car had rounded the corner, he sighed and stepped into the garage. He had filled five large trash bags when Marlene's bicycle stopped at the garage entrance.

"What are you doing?" Marlene asked.

Mackenzie looked up. "My mom gave me the afternoon to clean out the garage. So much for enjoying my last day of freedom."

Marlene lowered her bike's kickstand and stepped into the garage. "If we both work at it, we can be done in half the time."

Mackenzie smiled. "Thanks. You can start with those stacks of old newspapers."

She piled them into a plastic recycling bin and hauled it to the curb beside the trash bags. When she had filled three bins, Marlene sat on an old trunk looking at her newsprint stained hands. "What next, boss?"

"We need to gather those old clothes to donate to Goodwill."

Marlene rubbed her hand along the surface of the trunk she was seated on. The trunk was sturdy, with intricate designs patterned on the metal. "This is a neat old chest. You don't see craftsmanship like this, these days."

Mackenzie chuckled. "Yeah, when I was a kid, I'd pretend it was a pirate's chest, filled with buried treasure. Imagine how let down I was when I found it was just more of my grandfather's junk that got shipped to my mom after he died. Now, we have a garage filled with his old suits and magazines and other useless stuff."

Time Waits for No Man

“How do you know all this stuff is useless junk?”

“Most of it is from projects he was working on. He was an inventor, but Mom says nothing he invented ever worked. She says he’d waste most of his paycheck on creating things like his artificial gravity device or his perpetual motion machine.”

“Cool! You had an eccentric inventor for a grandfather? Mine was just a plumber. When did he die?”

Mackenzie shrugged. “I’m not sure. There was no funeral. One day, he disappeared. They never found his body and years later, my grandmother had him declared dead so she could get his benefits. Then, when she died, all this stuff was shipped to our door. Mom’s been storing it in the garage.”

Marlene eyed the chest. “So what’s inside the pirate’s chest? Your grandfather’s socks?”

“Beats me. It’s locked. I don’t think they ever shipped us the key, or if they did, Mom lost it. I’ve tried to open it, but it won’t budge. They built that trunk as secure as any pirate’s chest.”

“I wonder what sort of key would fit it? I bet it would be a lot bigger than my house key. Probably heavier, too.”

Mackenzie absently fingered his house key in his pocket. He knew it wouldn’t fit, but was tempted to try it anyway, when his fingers touched the heavy metal keepsake he’d kept in his pocket during his school break. He pulled the ornate, black iron key from his pocket.

“What’s that?” Marlene asked.

A boy’s pocket was, in its own way, a treasure trove of various items; a tailored cache into which all sorts of objects might find their way. Mackenzie twirled the key, almost

The 25th Hour

mesmerized by the hypnotic effect of the sunlight striking the metal. "I've been carrying it around for a while. I guess you could call it my good luck charm. Like a rabbit's foot, you know?"

"I don't believe that superstitious stuff. After all, how lucky can a rabbit's foot be if the rabbit lost it?"

"Yeah, this wasn't lucky for its owner, either. The guy who gave it to me turned to dust."

Marlene reached for a flashlight, placed it beneath her chin, and flipped it on, bathing her face in its glow. "If we're going to tell ghost stories, we need the right atmosphere."

"I'm not making it up. Remember the last day of school? When I passed through Warehouse Row? I met this weird old guy. He gave me the key and said I'd know what to do with it. Then, he sort of... disintegrated."

"Sounds to me like you've been reading too much science fiction."

"I don't care if you don't believe me; it's true. Have I ever lied to you?"

Marlene shook her head. "No, I guess not. But you've got to admit, that's a little hard to believe."

"I know. That's why I kept the key. Whenever I think I might have dreamed it, I reach into my pocket and feel it. It's heavy and it's real. It's proof it really happened."

"That's a fancy key. The pattern is similar to the one on the chest. See if it fits."

Mackenzie laughed. "Fat chance. Why would some stranger have a key to my grandfather's chest?"

"Maybe it's a skeleton key. They fit all kinds of locks."

Mackenzie studied the ornate key. "I guess it could be. There's one way to find out." He inserted the key into the

Time Waits for No Man

iron lock on the chest's lid. "Hey, it's turning!" With a click, the lock popped open.

"If there's gold or treasure in there, we split it," Marlene said. "After all, I'm helping you clean your garage."

Mackenzie lifted the lid and he and Marlene peered inside the musty trunk. "Phew, it stinks of mildew." He pulled out a stack of notepads. "Some treasure chest. It's filled with my grandfather's notes on his kooky inventions."

"What's that underneath?" Marlene pointed to a small metallic object.

Mackenzie picked it up. "It's a pocket watch." He opened the bronze timepiece and wound the stem. "It still works, too. I bet I could get ten bucks for this on eBay."

"You should have your mother call those *Antique Roadshow* people. They find junk in people's attics worth hundreds of dollars."

"My mother." The old man's warning rang in Mackenzie's ears. "Let's not tell her about the watch. It'll be our secret, all right?"

Marlene nodded. "Whatever you say. Can I use your bathroom?"

"Sure, you know where it is."

"I'll be right back. I just have to change my... um, you know, girl stuff. Then, we can finish cleaning out the garage."

Mackenzie nodded and closed the trunk. He opened the pocket watch and set it to the correct time. He wiped it with his shirt, accidentally pressing its stem down, twisting it slightly. He set it on the trunk lid and returned to work.

When he had finished, he wiped the sweat from his brow. He looked up at the sound of the door creaking open.

The 25th Hour

“See, I told you I’d be quick,” Marlene said.

“Where did you go? I thought you’d bailed on me.”

“Jeez, I was only gone for three minutes.”

“Three minutes? In girl time, maybe. I’ve spent the last hour finishing up the job.”

Marlene gazed around the garage, observing all the debris had been cleared and the remaining items neatly stacked. “How did you do all that while I was gone?”

“By working my butt off for an hour — alone.”

“But I was only in the bathroom for a few minutes.”

Mackenzie flipped open the pocket watch. “I set the watch an hour ago after you left, at 2 o’clock. And now it’s....” Mackenzie gasped. “Two o’three? This watch is so old, it must be slow.”

Marlene looked at her wristwatch and held it out for Mackenzie to see. “Look, 2:03. Both watches show the same time.”

Mackenzie checked his own wristwatch. “Mine says 2:03, too. It can’t be. Look around. Do you think I cleaned this whole place in three minutes?”

Marlene shook her head. “There’s no way. But how?”

A broad grin stretched across Mackenzie’s face. “Maybe that weird guy I met was an alien from outer space and the key he gave me is some sort of magical key to the universe—”

“Time to rein in your geek imagination, Mac. If aliens ever do visit Earth, they’ll give the key to the universe to the president, not some shy geek from our junior high in a nowhere town like Serenity Valley.”

“I guess you’re right. Besides, he didn’t have a spaceship.” Mackenzie put the pocket watch back into his pocket and

Time Waits for No Man

reopened the chest. “Maybe the answer is in one of these notebooks.”

Marlene sighed. “You can spend your last hours of vacation reading silly old notebooks pretending they’re pirate journals or spaceship logs, but I’m heading to the park. You want to come?”

Mackenzie flipped the trunk lid. “Sure. Let’s go.” As he and Marlene left the garage, he glanced back at the chest, eager to return.

That night, Mackenzie returned to the garage. He dug the key from his pocket and inserted it into the chest’s lock. Lifting the lid, he shined his flashlight into the trunk. He saw dozens of notepads, all filled with his grandfather’s near illegible scribbles and drawings. Most of what he read made no sense. A lot of words he couldn’t make out and many he did were big words he’d never seen. Then, there were the formulas, all numbers and letters that looked like an algebra homework assignment gone mad. He was convinced his grandfather was either a genius or a madman... or both. He decided he would flip through one last notebook before locking up the trunk for good. All the math was reminding him of his impending return to school in the morning, a topic he wanted to forget. He flipped through the notes, stopping when he saw a penciled sketch of a pocket watch. Mackenzie pulled the bronze watch from his pocket and compared it to the drawing. It was identical.

“Mackenzie! Is that you in the garage?”

Startled by his mother’s voice, Mackenzie closed the trunk and slid the notepad inside his shirt. “Yeah, Mom. I’ll be right out.”

The 25th Hour

“What are you doing in the garage at this time of night?” she called back.

Mackenzie thought quickly. “I left my house keys here when I was cleaning.” He locked the trunk and slipped the pocket watch into his pants. Then, he bolted out the door, headed toward his bedroom.

“Did you find them?” his mother asked.

“Yep.” He kissed her goodnight. “I’m going to turn in now. I want to get an early start tomorrow.”

His mother frowned. “I’ve never seen you eager for school. Still, I’m not complaining. Sleep tight.”

Mackenzie crawled into bed. He shined his flashlight under the covers and what he read from his grandfather’s journal was more exciting than any pirate log.

Chapter Two

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

THE RINGING OF THE SCHOOL bell reverberated through the hallway. Mackenzie struggled to keep his books from falling out of his locker, without success. He watched his math book tumble to the floor, directly into the path of Tucker Bryant's sneakers.

"Late again, Mortimer?" Tucker dropkicked the book, sending it caroming across the waxed floor. "You must enjoy getting detentions." He noticed a sheet of notebook paper fly out from the spiraling book and picked it up before Mackenzie could react.

"Hey!" Mackenzie cried. "Give me back my homework."

Tucker laughed, as he crumpled it into a ball and stuck it in his pocket. "Forgot your homework again? You're racking up detention time." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a candy bar. "Tell you what. I'll swap you for it."

"I don't want your melted old candy bar, Bryant. Just give me my homework."

The 25th Hour

Tucker stepped toward Mackenzie and unwrapped the candy bar. “Hmm, it is melted. Guess I kept it in my pocket too long. But you can still have it.” He shoved the chocolate bar down the seat of Mackenzie’s pants and smacked his rear. As he pulled his hand away, Tucker snagged the waistband of Mackenzie’s underwear and yanked it. “Now that’s a quality wedgie. I can’t wait till gym to hear you try to convince everyone in the locker room those brown stains on your underwear are chocolate.” He laughed. “We’ll need a new nickname for you. How about ‘Brownie’?”

“At least, give me my homework,” Mackenzie pleaded.

Tucker hesitated. He pulled the wadded ball from his pocket and bounced it in his palm. “I was going to toss it, but, if you want it so bad, say ‘please’.”

Mackenzie grimaced. “Please.”

“You don’t sound too sincere. Try again. This time, on your knees.”

Mackenzie glanced down the deserted hall. The other students had already taken their seats in their classrooms. Arriving late to class was bad enough, but walking in empty-handed would earn him the teacher’s ire for a week. At least there was no audience for his humiliation at Tucker’s hands, this time, he thought, dropping to his knees. “Please give me my homework.”

Tucker chuckled. “Close your eyes and open your mouth, dweeb.”

Mackenzie tasted the paper on his tongue and pulled the wadded ball from his mouth.

Tucker waved a hall pass in front of Mackenzie’s face. “Too bad you don’t have one of these. Hope you think up a good excuse for being late.”

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

Mackenzie's eyes squinted in anger, as he watched Tucker dart down the hall. He gathered his books and shoved them back into his locker. He uncrumpled his homework, attempting to flatten it out. "One day, you'll be sorry for this," he swore. Slipping his homework back inside his algebra book, Mackenzie ran to class.

"Numbers are like events," Mr. Reddiger told the algebra class, before the creaking door distracted the students' attention. Mackenzie crept toward the back of the classroom. "Some are variable, occurring at random, and others are constants one can rely on, such as Mr. Mortimer being late for class."

The class laughed, as Mackenzie slunk into his seat. He felt the stares of his classmates and was horrified to see Vanessa Carlyle laughing with the rest. He had longed to be noticed by her, but not this way. He blushed, and shyly turned his head.

The clock above Mr. Reddiger's desk moved exceedingly slow, Mackenzie thought. He pondered how strange it was time moved slowly when he was bored but always went by quickly whenever he was having fun. *That's odd*, he thought. *Shouldn't time be constant, not variable?* His thoughts drifted to his grandfather's journals. He had been poring over them, night after night, trying to make sense out of what little he could decipher. There were more equations composed of letters and numbers than in his entire algebra textbook and weird symbols he'd never seen. But what little he could understand excited him, and he couldn't wait to tell Marlene at lunch.

The cafeteria line was long, as usual. Mackenzie studied the square object on his tray, trying to determine what food

The 25th Hour

group it belonged to. He grabbed a milk carton, paid the cashier, and scouted the cafeteria for Marlene. He joined her at a small table by the wall. "Hey."

"Hey," Marlene replied.

He shot her his puppy dog look. "Can I copy your biology homework?"

Marlene sighed. "Again?"

"I was going to do it after dinner, but I got caught up reading my grandfather's journals. There's never enough time to do everything I need to do; after all, there are only twenty-four hours in a day."

"All right, but change a few answers. Mrs. Gertbauer is going to get suspicious if we keep turning in identical papers."

He nodded. "You're not going to believe what I've discovered in those old notebooks. My grandfather wrote tons of stuff about the pocket watch and what it can do. I don't understand the specifics, but it's amazing. It explains what happened that day we found it."

Marlene squinted. "What do you mean?"

"The watch does something to time."

"Yeah, it tells you what time it is." She laughed.

"No, I mean it controls time. You can use it to travel through time."

Marlene gave him a disbelieving look. "You and your science fiction books. Besides, everyone knows you need a DeLorean to travel through time."

"I'm not talking about traveling to the past or the future. Look, an hour is made up of sixty minutes and a minute is made up of sixty seconds. Suppose we could take the time between two of those seconds and make it last for a minute or an hour?"

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

“So what? Then, it would be a minute or an hour.”

“For us, yes. But not for everyone else. For the person holding the watch, time would move so slowly, it would seem like everything was frozen. That split second would be like a snapshot only you could walk about in, while everything else was static. Time works like a filmstrip: everyone is stuck on each frame but whoever holds the watch can move between frames.”

“So, it is traveling through time, but only for a second?”

“Yeah, but a second that can last an hour. That day in my garage, I accidentally nudged one of the stems on the pocket watch and froze time. It gave me an hour to clean out the garage, but for you and the rest of the world, only a second had passed. When you came back three minutes later, I had lived an extra hour.” He drew the watch from his pocket. “I tested it today. In second period, I froze time. I erased the blackboard and replaced the teacher’s lesson with lyrics from a rap song. I filled the entire board and was back in my seat looking innocent before the teacher blinked.”

“No way.” Marlene shook her head. “That’s not possible. Do I look that gullible?”

Mackenzie saw Tucker Bryant carrying his lunch tray down the aisle. “I’ll prove it to you. Keep an eye on Bryant.” He pressed the smaller stem on the pocket watch and twisted it.

The cafeteria looked the same to Mackenzie, but the first difference he noticed was the noise. There wasn’t any. The loud chatter, the hum of the air conditioner, the clanking of dishes — it was all gone. The silence was palpable. All the background noises he had routinely blocked out — traffic sounds from outside, music blaring from headsets, students

The 25th Hour

chattering, birds squawking on the window ledge, and machinery hums and buzzes — were absent. Marlene didn't budge. Vanessa, seated several tables away, held a soup spoon in front of her gaping mouth. Another girl poured her milk into a glass, but the stream of milk had become a solid white arch between the carton and the glass. The cafeteria appeared filled with a hundred motionless mannequins dressed as students.

Mackenzie glanced at the wall clock. It read 12:34. It would remain 12:34 until Mackenzie Mortimer decided to allow it to become 12:35. He opened his notebook and wrote "Kick Me" in big letters with his marker. He ripped out the loose-leaf sheet and applied a piece of tape from his book bag to the other side. Mackenzie carried the note down the silent aisle, pausing when he reached the still figure of his nemesis, Tucker Bryant. "You don't look so scary, now," he mocked the silent bully, sticking the note on Tucker's back. Mackenzie knelt, tying Tucker's shoelaces together with strong double knots. He nodded, satisfied with his handiwork. He dashed to the kitchen, unchallenged by the lifeless kitchen staff, and returned with a large plastic tub of mashed potatoes, which he positioned two feet in front of Tucker. He strolled back to his table and resumed his position beside Marlene. He turned the pocket watch stem counterclockwise and pulled it up.

"Why am I watching Tuck—?" Marlene asked. She stopped in mid-sentence, as Tucker Bryant tripped over his tied shoelaces. His food tray sailed through the air and he landed face first in the tub of mashed potatoes. The cafeteria broke out in waves of laughter. Several smaller kids, seeing Tucker temporarily blinded by potatoes and wearing a sign

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

inviting them to kick him, took advantage of his awkward position by giving him several swift kicks to his butt, pushing his face deeper into the mashed potatoes. Tucker wiped his face and tried to chase them, but stumbled before realizing his shoelaces were knotted.

Marlene gasped. "You didn't..."

Mackenzie beamed. "Yep."

"It's not possible. It must be a coincidence. But how did you know that was going to happen?"

"Because I did it. I slowed down time and arranged the prank. I had all the time I needed. I even double-knotted his shoelaces." Mackenzie saw she was still skeptical. "Want to see a replay? Watch this."

Mackenzie pressed the pocket watch stem and twisted it clockwise. He was back in the eerie world between seconds. He approached Tucker, who was now standing in the aisle, having wiped the mashed potatoes from his face. Mackenzie marveled at the white clumps suspended in the air, awaiting his permission to fall to the ground. He reached for one clump, examined it, and set the mashed potato on Tucker's head. He unbuckled the bully's belt and Tucker's pants slid to his ankles. Mackenzie looped the belt around the sagging pants between Tucker's legs, ensuring the boy would have to untangle it before pulling up his pants. Returning to Marlene, he turned the watch stem counterclockwise and pulled it up.

Marlene blinked. "Oh my God! You pantsed him."

At first, Tucker Bryant didn't know why the waves of laughter had grown louder. It took him a moment to realize he was standing in his school cafeteria with his pants down to his ankles, once he saw the guffawing boys and girls

The 25th Hour

pointing at him. He frantically yanked his pants up, but the looped belt prevented him from pulling them up completely, prolonging his embarrassment.

"I see it but I don't believe it," Marlene said.

Mackenzie savored his revenge, as he watched the bully struggle to untangle the belt. A red-faced Tucker Bryant raced from the cafeteria amid the hooting and hollering of his classmates.

"That was cruel," Marlene said.

"Bryant deserved it. He stole my math homework and made me late for class."

"Even so, you humiliated him. He's going to be the butt of jokes for weeks." Marlene grinned. "I guess it's good for him to learn what it feels like to be helpless and picked on. But Mac, that watch gives you incredible power. You can't use it irresponsibly."

Mackenzie grimaced. He disliked being reprimanded, but he knew Marlene was right. "At least you believe me now."

Marlene munched on a cookie. "So how does it work, über geek?"

Mackenzie shook his head. "I haven't figured it out, yet. The notes talk about gravity. I've read some science fiction where time travel is possible because of the gravitational fields of black holes. Maybe the watch acts like a portable black hole generator. I know you have to travel faster than the speed of light to travel through time. The watch must make my atoms vibrate at a faster frequency, so I'm moving while everything else appears frozen, but it's moving too, only super slow. Incredible as it seems, I must be moving at light speed when I'm in Q-Time."

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

“Q-Time?”

“The space between seconds. My grandfather’s notes called it Accelerated Time but I renamed it Quick-Time. You should see it, Marlene. It’s surreal. I’ve never heard anything so quiet. Even at midnight, the crickets still chirp. But not in Q-Time. That’s because, at light speed, you’re traveling faster than the speed of sound. It’s eerie, but peaceful. You can be in a room full of people but feel totally alone. They don’t move, you know. Leastways, not that you can see... a centimeter or two, at best. It’s weird, but when I’m in Q-Time, it feels like I’m the only living person in the world.”

“Sounds spooky. You’d better be careful; you might get trapped there.”

Mackenzie shook his head. “Not according to the journals. My grandfather put a failsafe into the watch. It’s timed to last for sixty minutes within a 24-hour cycle. You don’t have to use all the minutes in one shot. I think of it as a time bank where you can withdraw up to sixty minutes each day.”

Marlene sipped her soda. “What if your time balance gets overdrawn?”

“Can’t happen. That’s where the failsafe kicks in. Use up sixty minutes and it’s just a pocket watch until the next day. It can read the buildup of chronal energy in your body, so when it sees you’ve absorbed sixty minutes worth by time-hopping into Q-Time it won’t let you time travel. Kind of like those ignition locks that won’t let you drive a car if they detect alcohol on your breath.” Mackenzie sliced a forkful of the mystery food on his tray and slid it into his mouth.

The 25th Hour

“Mac, it could be dangerous, especially in the wrong hands. We should tell the government about your grandfather’s invention.”

“Hell no!” Mackenzie cried. “They’d keep it for themselves. It belongs to my family and no one else is going to get it.”

“Shouldn’t that decision be up to your mother, since it was her father’s watch?”

Mackenzie grimaced. “She must never find out about the watch. That’s what the dying man warned me. It makes sense, now. He knew about the watch and he must have come from the future to warn me. Her life depends on me keeping the watch secret from her.”

Marlene sighed. “Fine, I promise not to tell anyone.”

Relieved, Mackenzie smiled. “Thanks, Marlene. I knew I could trust you.”

“But Mac, be careful. If you got hurt or something happened to you in Q-Time, there’d be no one to help you.”

Mackenzie’s smile faded, as he pondered Marlene’s comment, realizing there were many aspects of his grandfather’s amazing invention he hadn’t considered.

Mackenzie experimented with the watch over the next few days. When his teacher called on him in class and he hadn’t done his homework, he discovered how convenient it was to have the ability to stop time, complete the assignment, and then unfreeze the moment, with no one the wiser. He never tired of finding creative ways to embarrass the school bully. He was standing at his locker, chuckling over his latest prank, when the locker door slammed into his face.

Marlene pulled back the door, glaring at Mackenzie.

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

“Marlene, are you nuts? That hurt.”

“Good. Stick your head inside your locker, so I can do it again.”

Mackenzie massaged the back of his head. “What’s wrong with you?”

“This.” Marlene held up an adhesive note. “One minute, I’m facing my gym locker and a second later, this — *Just passing thru, Mac ;)* — appears in front of me. You time-shifted into the girls’ locker room!”

Mackenzie put his finger to his lips. “Keep your voice down. I was experimenting with the watch.” A sheepish grin crossed his face. “Then, I got to thinking about Vanessa and I was passing the locker room and, well, I thought she was probably showering and—”

“You perv!”

“She wasn’t, so it doesn’t matter, anyway.”

“You invaded our privacy. That’s wrong, Mac.”

Mackenzie lowered his head. “Gee, I just did what any guy would, if he had the watch. What do you expect? I’m a thirteen-year-old boy. Don’t lecture me on responsibility again, either. I’m not even responsible enough to do my chores. I don’t see why you’re so upset. You were dressed, and besides, you’re my friend; I’d never want to see you naked. Honest, Marlene, I’d never look at you.”

Marlene’s face flushed with rage. “Mackenzie Mortimer, you... you... you’re such a jerk.” She slammed the locker door on his hand and stormed down the hall, leaving the confused boy shaking his head.

Margo Walston caught up with her. “Whoa, Marlene. I saw your flare-up with your boyfriend. What happened?” Margo, a ninth grader, had befriended Marlene on the first

The 25th Hour

day of classes. Marlene had been overwhelmed by the transition to junior high and Margo was more than happy to become the “older sister” to whom she could turn for advice.

Marlene pouted. “Boyfriend? I wish.”

“I always see you two together, so I thought—”

“Mac doesn’t even notice I’m a girl.”

“Friend zoned, huh?” Margo tugged on Marlene’s cap. “The baseball cap probably doesn’t help. The whole tomboy look is sending the wrong signals. Come by my place after school and I’ll show you a few makeup tricks.”

Marlene shrugged. “It wouldn’t help. He only has eyes for Vanessa Carlyle.”

“She’s a stylish dresser. Of course, she can afford to be. Her father owns the largest business in town. Even the principal’s husband works there.”

“She’s beautiful, Margo.” Marlene clutched her hair. “I bet she doesn’t know what split ends are. Her hair is perfect, her cheekbones are perfect, everything about her is perfect. Even her complexion is perfect. How can a girl go through junior high without a single zit? All the makeup in the world can’t help me compete against her.”

“Mac might have a crush on her, but I don’t see her hanging with him. You’ve got the inside track. Not to mention freckles and a ponytail. Give him time. He’ll give up on Vanessa, especially if she rejects him. Then, you’ll be there for him to turn to. But the baseball cap has got to go.”

Her eyes darted down. “The *Nightfall* t-shirts, too?”

Margo nodded. “Eighty-six the geek look. No comic books, no *Star Wars*, and especially no vampires. It’s great you share the same interests, but now we’ve got to spring you from the friend zone.”

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

The class bell interrupted their chat.

"Thanks, Margo. I'll catch you after school." Marlene walked into her history class. She didn't look at Mackenzie as she passed him. *Why are boys so dumb?* she thought. She sat at her desk, letting her gaze fall on Vanessa Carlyle. *One zit. Please, God, just one big, ugly zit. That's all I ask for.*

Mr. Larson, the history teacher, picked up a stack of papers from his desk and passed them out to the class. "I can see you people had better things to do before the test than studying. George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher, said 'Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.' A lot of you may be repeating history in summer school, if these exam scores are any indication."

The class groaned. Mackenzie looked at the D-minus on his paper. *Great*, he thought. *Vanessa doesn't know I'm alive, Marlene wishes I were dead, and when my mother sees my grades, I might be.* He stared at the wall clock, trying to will its hands to move faster. He was already bored and wanted to be anywhere but in the classroom. *I wish something would happen to make the next hour interesting.*

Mackenzie had no idea he was about to get his wish. A boy, about 16, burst into the room brandishing an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle. "Nobody move!"

"What do you think you're doing, young man?" Mr. Larson asked.

"Shut up. I heard enough from you last year when I was in your class. Before you flunked me. That's why we're starting with the history class."

"We?" Mr. Larson asked.

"My friend's going to ring the fire alarm as soon as I start shooting. When the halls fill with students, they're going to

The 25th Hour

turn into a shooting gallery. We'll score a higher body count than Columbine and Virginia Tech combined."

"If you start shooting, you won't get out of this alive," Vanessa said. "There'll be SWAT teams surrounding the school in minutes."

The boy laughed. "We ain't planning to make it out alive. I was born covered in someone else's blood and that's how I'm going out. But we'll be famous. People will be talking about us long after we're dead."

"You're crazy!" Marlene said.

The boy whirled his rifle barrel toward her. "And you're dead."

Mackenzie grasped the pocket watch. "Don't shoot her!" he cried.

The gunman turned in his direction. "You want to volunteer to be the first target? Fine by me. This baby shoots sixty rounds per minute. I bet I can hit both of you and everyone in between in the first minute. Then, I'll finish off the rest of you losers and join my friend in the hall for the real fun. Eat lead, sucker."

Mackenzie watched the boy's finger depress the trigger on the AR-15. He pushed down the watch stem and turned it clockwise, projecting himself into the world of Q-Time. He blinked, adjusting to his altered perception of reality. He stared cross-eyed at the cylindrical projectile six inches from his nose. *It's the bullet! Stopped in mid-air.* The sight of the suspended bullet fascinated Mackenzie. *If it hadn't been for the pocket watch, I'd be dead.* Then, a shocking realization struck him. *What the—? It's coming closer! But that's not supposed to happen.* Mackenzie swatted the bullet, knocking it to the floor. He saw two more bullets, one heading toward

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

Marlene and the second toward Vanessa. *Of course. The watch doesn't stop time; it slows it down. In physics class, we learned a bullet travels 2,800 feet per second. Even in the space between seconds, those bullets are moving.* Mackenzie jumped over a desk and caught the bullet aimed at Marlene, and then raced to snatch the bullet headed toward Vanessa. He looked at his scorched palm. "Ow! Friction burns. I forgot they're moving objects, even if that movement is nearly imperceptible." He pocketed the bullets and looked at the watch. "I don't have much time left. If only I could take back the minutes I used fooling around with the watch earlier."

The rifle. Mackenzie focused on the AR-15 in the boy's hands. *I've got to take that gun away from him before he can fire again.* Mackenzie approached the shooter. He grasped the weapon's handguard to pull it from his hand, but he could not dislodge it from the boy's grip. Mackenzie tried to pry the boy's fingers from the pistol grip, but found they were frozen around it. "Damn!" He glanced at the pocket watch. "I've got nine minutes left before the failsafe kicks in and my hour is up for the day. But I can't get the gun to budge from his hands." *Nine minutes before the bullets resume spraying into the crowded classroom and ricocheting off the walls.* He pictured Marlene, Vanessa, and the rest of his classmates lying in pools of blood.

Wait a minute. I've been going about this all wrong. Guns don't kill people; bullets do. Mackenzie studied the deadly AR-15. He perused a rectangular object jutting from the gun in front of the shooter's clenched fist. *That's the magazine holding the bullets.* His eye traveled up the magazine well to a small button. *And that's the magazine release button.*

The 25th Hour

Mackenzie pressed the button and the magazine popped out. He picked it up from the floor and slipped it into the rear pocket of his jeans. He held the pocket watch in his left hand, twisting the stem counter-clockwise and pulling it up with his forefinger and his index finger, while clenching his right hand into a fist. Mackenzie swung his fist as he emerged from Q-Time, striking the older teen in the face.

Unprepared for the blow, the shooter stumbled back. Mackenzie rubbed his fist against his side. *Damn, that hurt. That's not fair; no one ever hurts their fist punching anyone in the movies.* The fire alarm pierced his ears. "Uh oh." Mackenzie realized the second shooter had heard the shots fired and set off the alarm. Students in every classroom would be flooding into the halls, unaware a deranged teenager armed with an AR-15 was waiting to pick them off. Mackenzie pushed the watch stem down and twisted it clockwise, re-entering Q-Time. "Seven and a half minutes," he muttered. "Seven and a half minutes to find his buddy and disarm him. If I can't do it in time, a whole lot of people are going to die."

Mackenzie dashed from the classroom and raced down the corridor. Students, now suspended in Q-Time, had begun to file into the hallway. Some had already been lining the halls, while others protruded from doorframes, caught in mid-flight. He scanned the passageway looking for the second gunman but didn't see him. He glanced at the watch. Seven minutes. Mackenzie ran down the hall, turning into the next hallway. "Where is he? Where is he?" Mackenzie panicked. *He might not be in one of the hallways. He could be inside any of the classrooms. It'll take hours to search every room.* He fingered the pocket watch. *If I restore the normal*

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

flow of time, I'll know where he is once he fires his gun. But if I do that, kids are going to die before I can reach him. If I don't, they'll die, anyway. "Unless..."

Mackenzie twisted the stem counterclockwise, pulled it up, and then immediately reversed his actions. For a split second, he heard the sound of gunfire before returning to the serenity of Q-Time. *Second floor. He's upstairs.* He looked at the watch, which showed five minutes remaining. *Sound travels five miles per second, while bullets only travel 2,800 feet per second. I can beat the bullets.*

Racing up the stairwell, Mackenzie was greeted by the frightened face of a teenaged girl, terror reflecting from her motionless eyes. *I must be close. She ran into the hall and saw a guy with a gun. He's got to be within a few feet.* Mackenzie peered down the corridor lined with paralyzed students. He checked his watch. Three and a half minutes. When he glanced up, he spotted the gunman at the rear of the hall. The slight stubble on the teen's chin led Mackenzie to conclude he was two, maybe three years older than him. With his backpack and faded jeans, he would have remained indistinguishable from any of the other students in the hall, were it not for the rifle he wielded. He had the buttstock of an AR-15 rifle pressed against his chest and his finger locked on the trigger. Mackenzie waded through the statue-like students, but this time he didn't waste precious seconds attempting to wrest the gun from the shooter. He spotted the magazine release button and popped the magazine into his hand. Mackenzie shoved it into his other rear pocket and spun around. He counted nine bullets suspended in the air.

No, not suspended. Spinning at a near imperceptible speed, propelled into the hallway toward helpless students

The 25th Hour

where the bullets would ricochet off the walls like balls in a racquetball court until they had found their deadly mark. Mackenzie looked at the pocket watch. He had two minutes left to stop nine bullets fired in different directions. One hundred and twenty seconds before he would be snapped back into normal time, against his will. He reached out, knocking the nearest one to the ground. His hand stung when it touched the bullet, but he knew the contact had ended its momentum. The next bullet Mackenzie stopped had been headed toward a brunette he had seen in his English class. He knocked a bullet from the path of a football player, and another directed at a smaller boy. He clipped a bullet before it could carom off the wall and halted another pointing at the crowd. Mackenzie glanced at the watch. "Forty-five seconds. I know I saw three more bullets. Where...?"

A glint of light reflecting off the shell betrayed one of the three. Mackenzie slammed his fist down on it. His eyes darted about, searching for the remaining pair. He saw a bullet an inch from the back of a boy's head, and snatched it in mid-air. Mackenzie felt a prick on his ear. He instinctively reached back to swat the insect. His hand brushed against the metal casing and he realized there were no insects fast enough to fly in Q-Time. He had stepped into the last bullet's trajectory, as the slow-spinning projectile grazed his ear.

The stillness was broken by sharp screams and the pushing and shoving of students attempting to flee. *The failsafe triggered*, Mackenzie thought. *My hour's up, but I did it.*

The teenaged gunman looked puzzled, as he pulled the trigger with no result.

A Glitch in Time Saves Nine

Mackenzie grinned. "Lose something?"

The shooter stared in disbelief at the empty magazine well in his AR-15.

Mackenzie held up the gun's magazine. "Looking for this?"

"I don't know how you did that, smart-ass, but that's the last trick you'll pull." The gunman reached into his backpack and pulled out another magazine filled with ammunition. "I'm the one carrying the extra ammo. We brought enough to turn these halls into Swiss cheese." He popped it into his rifle's magazine well.

Mackenzie's eyes bulged. He glanced down the long hallway, wondering how far he could get before being mowed down in a hail of semi-automatic gunfire. He knew, without the pocket watch, he would never make it in time.

"Don't bother running kid; your time is up." The teen raised the gun. "You'll make a nice splat on the wall."

Mackenzie gulped. Had it all been for nothing? Had he merely postponed a killing spree? He wanted a chance to say goodbye to his family, and Marlene, and Vanessa. If only he could have a little more time.

The AR-15 tumbled to the floor, followed by the teenaged gunman. Tucker Bryant withdrew his arm.

"Did you see that?" a girl asked excitedly.

"That was awesome," a boy said. "Bryant knocked that dude out with one blow to the head."

"Tucker saved the school from that nutcase terrorist," another girl said. "He's a hero."

Mackenzie slipped away. From the window, he saw Marlene outside with the other students who were

The 25th Hour

evacuating the building. He climbed down the stairs to join her.

When she saw him, Marlene raced to him and embraced him in a bear hug. "Mac, you're safe! I was so worried."

"You're not still mad at me?"

"You idiot. What happened? When you disappeared, I assumed you used the watch."

Mackenzie dug a bullet out of his pocket and gave it to her. "This one had your name on it. I stopped them all, Marlene. But then I ran out of time. He was going to shoot me, but Tucker Bryant slugged him first. Now, no one knows what I did and Bryant is a hero. Yesterday, they were all talking about him getting pantsed. Now all they'll be talking about is how he saved the school from terrorists." He grimaced. "I wish they had shot me."

She held up the bullet. "Did you do it for the glory?"

Mackenzie shook his head. "Of course not, Marlene. I did it to save you and the others."

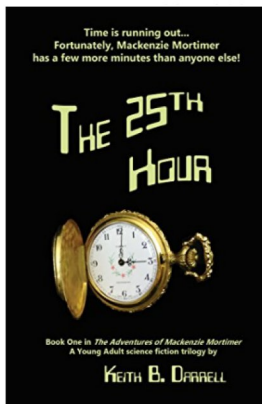
"Then, why do you care who gets the credit? You can do a lot of good with that pocket watch, so long as you don't mind who gets the credit, Mac."

He shrugged. "I guess. What do you say we skip school for the rest of the day? I doubt they're going to hold classes after this."

Marlene smiled. "We could shoot some hoops at the basketball court."

"All right, but don't say shoot." Mackenzie wrapped his arm around her shoulder and led her away.

Marlene glanced back and saw Margo wink at her.



The 25th Hour: The Adventures of Mackenzie Mortimer, Book One

Kindle Edition

by [Keith B. Darrell](#) (Author)



4 customer reviews

Kindle

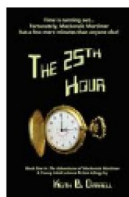
\$3.99

Paperback

\$12.95

Mackenzie Mortimer is a typical junior high geek: shy, awkward, late with his homework, and always late for class. He's never got enough time to do everything he needs to do; after all, there are only 24 hours in a day. But when Mac finds his grandfather's pocket watch, he discovers his days have an extra hour. The eccentric inventor's journal reveals the watch can add up to 60 minutes to a single day by freezing time around whomever controls it. When a crisis looms for Mac and his friends, time is running out... but fortunately, Mackenzie Mortimer has a few more minutes than anyone else.

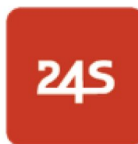
**Available in
Paperback, Kindle, and EPUB**



The 25th Hour: The Adventures of Mackenzie Mortimer, Book One

by [Keith B. Darrell](#)

is available at any of these digital stores:



Visit www.KeithBDarrell.com

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

KEITH B. DARRELL is a cross-genre author of short stories, novels, epics, and nonfiction. His work is available in softcover and hardcover from Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com; in e-book format from Amazon.com and Payhip.com; in audiobook format from Audible.com, as a digital download from VitalSource, and on his blog at KeithBDarrell.com.

Darrell studied journalism at Broward Community College, during which time he was awarded First Place for Best In-depth Reporting from the 28-school Florida Community College Press Association. He wrote numerous hard news stories for the BCC newspaper *The Phoenix*, and articles for *Silver Sands*, the BCC feature news magazine. He was later selected as editor of *Silver Sands* and the BCC *Orientations* magazine which afforded him experience in magazine layout. He earned his Bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Florida with a concentration in News-Editorial (news writing, editing, and photojournalism). He had newspaper internships with the *Gainesville Sun*, *High Springs Herald*, and *Alachua Herald*. He was also a freelance writer and photographer for the *Gainesville Sun*, and a writer for the *Emory Law Times* and the Georgia State University *Signal*. He has interviewed dozens of celebrities and politicians.

By age 24, Darrell had earned his A.A. from Broward Community College, his B.S. in Journalism from the University of Florida, his M.B.A. from Emory University, and his J.D. from the Emory University School of Law. He went on to become a member of the State Bar of Georgia and the Florida Bar. Darrell has held many positions as a reporter, advertising representative, entrepreneur, retail business owner, insurance agent, stockbroker, real estate

Author Biography

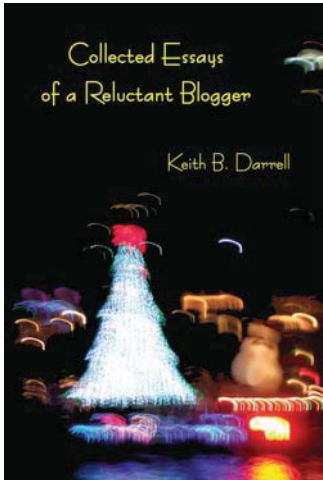
agent, Web designer, attorney, and author. In 2005, Darrell founded Amber Book Company and wrote its flagship title, *Issues in Internet Law: Society, Technology, and the Law*, which is now in its 10th edition and has been adapted as a textbook by colleges and universities worldwide. Darrell's legal articles have been published in **Securities Regulation Law Journal** and **JD/MBA Journal**.

Darrell's nonfiction books include: *Collected Essays of a Reluctant Blogger* (a collection of humorous anecdotes, philosophical musings, and insightful commentary on today's societal concerns derived from his blog at KeithBDarrell.com); *More Essays of a Reluctant Blogger*; *Putting Your Business on the Internet*; and *The Web Designer's Client Handbook*.

He has also written more than 70 short stories contained in four collections, *Randoms* (NIE Awards Finalist, 2009), *Careywood*, *Shards* (NIE Awards Finalist, 2013), and *Shards: The Omnibus Edition*; the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga: *Paved with Good Intentions* (Book 1), *And a Child Shall Lead Them* (Book 2), *To Hell in a Handbasket* (Book 3), and *The Witches' Cauldron* (Book 4); and *The Halos & Horns Omnibus Edition* (a 904-page book consisting of the four-book series with 61 color illustrations, commentary, and the novelette, *The Pandora Chronicles*); the *Fangs & Fur* fantasy series (the spin-off series from *Halos & Horns* for vampire and werewolf fans) consisting of *Flashbacks* (Book 1), *Nightstalkers* (Book 2), and *Nosferatu, Inc.* (Book 3); *Cops and Robbers*; and the Young Adult science fiction trilogy, *The Adventures of Mackenzie Mortimer: The 25th Hour* (Book 1), *The Tomorrow Paradox* (Book 2), and *All the Time in the World* (Book 3).

Darrell's interests include his pets, photography, genealogy, art, literature, theater, old comic books, travel, and learning about different cultures and languages.

ALSO BY THIS AUTHOR



Collected Essays of a Reluctant Blogger
Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-19-1

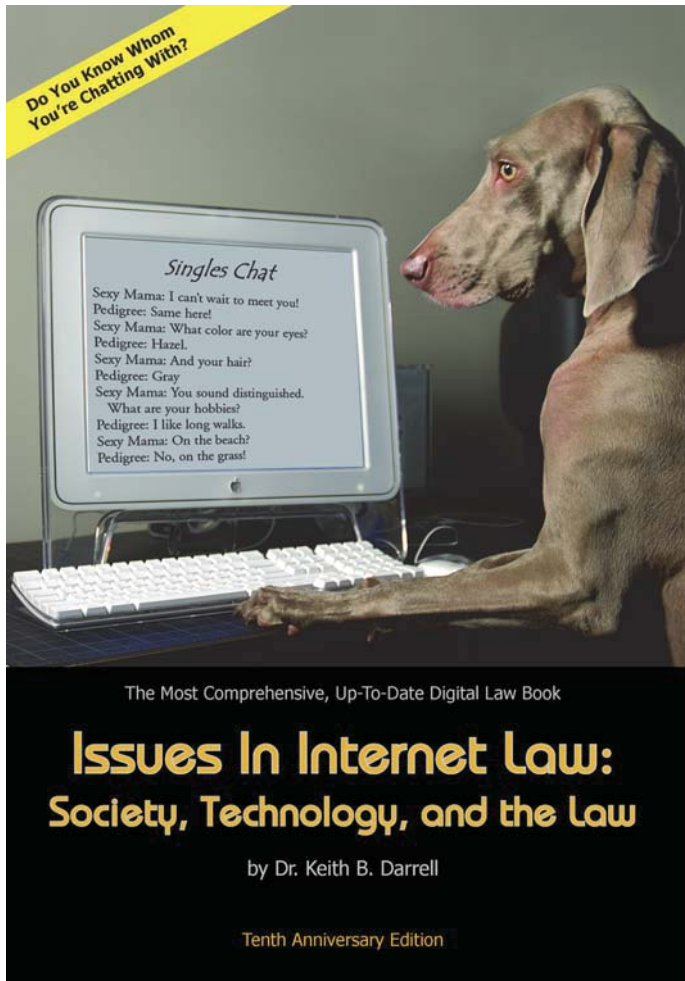
These two volumes are collections of random thoughts consigned to paper: some witty, others profound, enlightening or entertaining, but all well written. Penned with panache, they serve as a concise, yet powerful example of Darrell's abilities as both writer and philosopher.



More Essays of a Reluctant Blogger
Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-27-6

Available from:
Amazon.com, AmberBookCompany.com

ALSO BY THIS AUTHOR



10th Edition, 586 pages, 7 x 10

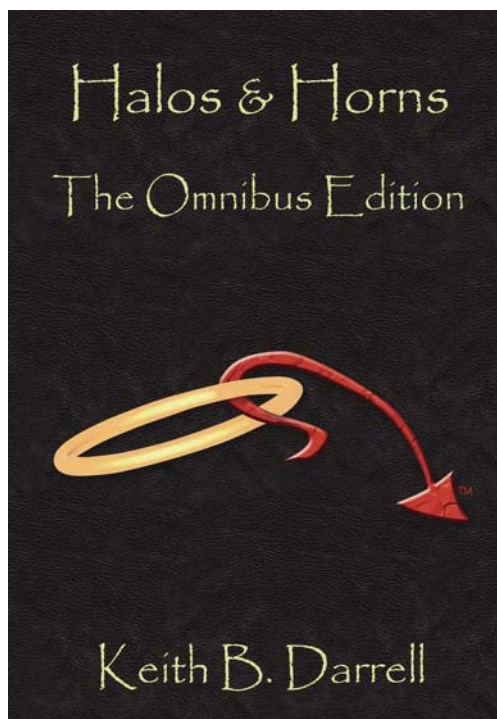
Hardcover • ISBN: 978-1-935971-31-3

Softcover • ISBN: 978-1-935971-30-6

Digital • <http://store.vitalsource.com/show/978-1-935971-AB-C>

Available from AmberBookCompany.com,
Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com and VitalSource.com

THE HALOS & HORNS FANTASY SAGA



The Halos & Horns Omnibus Edition, a deluxe coffee table book replete with 61 new color illustrations, contains all four volumes in the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga; the author's previously unpublished essays on the mythos; the comprehensive *Guide to the Halos & Horns Multiverse*; and the novelette, *The Pandora Chronicles* — a preview of the forthcoming *Fangs & Fur* series, the spin-off from *Halos & Horns* for vampire and werewolf fans.

7x10 Color softcover edition, 904 pp. ISBN 978-1-935971-20-7

7x10 Color hardcover edition, 904 pp. ISBN 978-1-935971-18-4

Available from:

Amazon.com, BN.com, AmberBookCompany.com

ALSO BY KEITH B. DARRELL:

Thrilling, dramatic, funny, and poignant, filled with action and adventure, featuring the strangest cast of characters in the most unusual storylines you've ever read!



The Halos & Horns Fantasy Saga

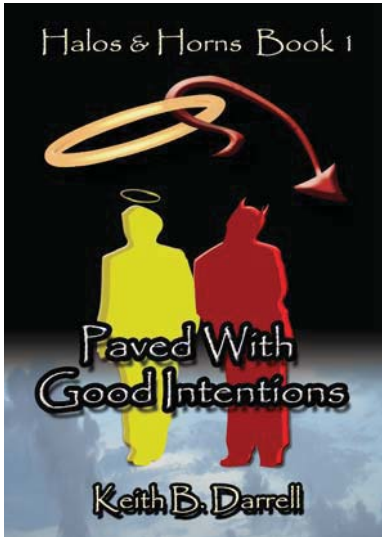
Exiled on Earth, naive angel Gabriel and amoral demon Lucifer, in the human guise of “Gabe Horn” and “Lou Cypher”, form an unlikely partnership as private investigators in Las Vegas. Their adventures take them across the seven heavenly realms, into the nine levels of Hell, through the dream realm of the Dreamscape, and even through time to Camelot. They encounter an assortment of the most imaginative characters in contemporary fantasy: dreamwalkers, golems, shapeshifters, vampires, werewolves, witches, and other supernatural creatures. Some of the vampires include Sharon — she’s Jewish, crosses don’t bother her; Pandora — trouble follows her like a shadow; Claude — he’s too claustrophobic to use a coffin; and Artemus — a 10-year-old boy who’s been a vampire for nearly 457 years; the corporate vampires of Nosferatu, Inc.; and the Skid Row “trampires”.

In Book 2, Gabe and Lou face the Dark Gods in their bid for domination of the multiverse. Ditzzy vampire Pandora is dating a werewolf, while speculation abounds over whether Lou or the warlock Mordred is the father of resident witch Samantha's baby. But now that the ancient, child-devouring succubus Lilith walks the Earth once more, how long can Samantha's infant or the other supernatural children — Emma the Cockney witchling; Siofra, the Irish changeling; Asabi, the African emere; Kaya, the Japanese hypnalis; and Artemus, the boy vampire — survive?

In Book 3, the angel Gabe Horn and demon Lou Cypher question their roles, as each embarks on a personal journey to discover his humanity, leading Gabriel to search for answers in the most unlikely of places. As Samantha ponders his proposal, Lucifer finds himself a reluctant ruler. Irish changeling Siofra adjusts to life hiding from Alaric in Japan with the ingénue Kaya, unaware of the girl's deadly secret. A familiar figure rises from obscurity to seize the reins of power at Nosferatu, Inc., while Morgana le Fay seeks vengeance for the fate of her son, Mordred.

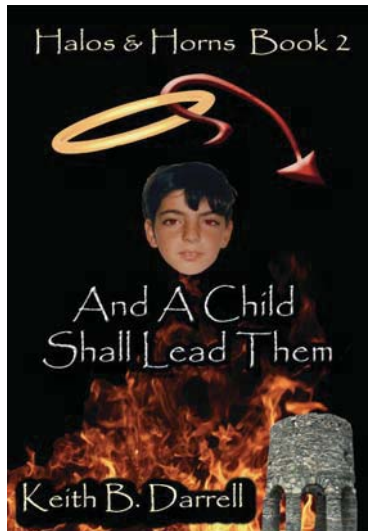
In Book 4, the angel Gabriel and the demon Asmodeus fight for their lives against usurper Baphomet and his demonic horde in his bid to take dominion of Hell; Lucifer faces judgment before the Eternals for murder; and Samantha Twitch joins forces with her sisters, witches Drusilla and Calliope, against the sorceress supreme Morgana le Fay and her Dark Fae minions. An attack on Nosferatu, Inc.'s Japanese headquarters by the Empusae, ancient vampiric demons, not only threatens Lady Chiyoko's territory, but will change the young hypnalis Kaya's life forever. Meanwhile, one character must journey back in time to 17th century Salem in search of the secret to defeating Morgana le Fay. But what other secrets does the Salem coven hold? No one is safe. As the *Halos & Horns* saga draws to its conclusion, who will survive?

ALSO BY THIS AUTHOR



Paperback

ISBN 978-1-935971-10-8



Paperback

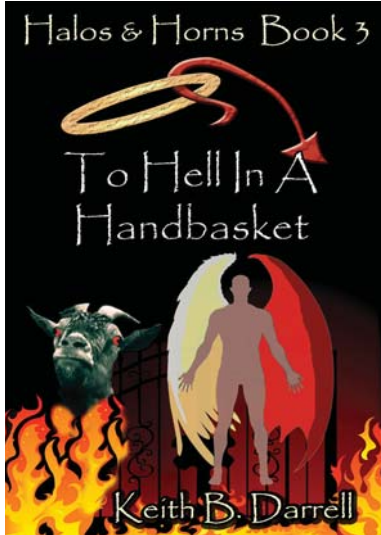
ISBN 978-1-935971-11-5



**Amber Book
Company LLC**

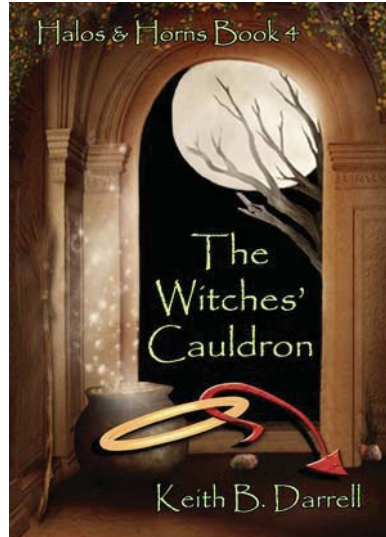
AmberBookCompany.com

THE HALOS & HORNS FANTASY SAGA



Paperback

ISBN 978-1-935971-12-2



Paperback

ISBN 978-1-935971-13-9

Available from:
Amazon.com
AmberBookCompany.com

THE FANGS & FUR FANTASY SAGA



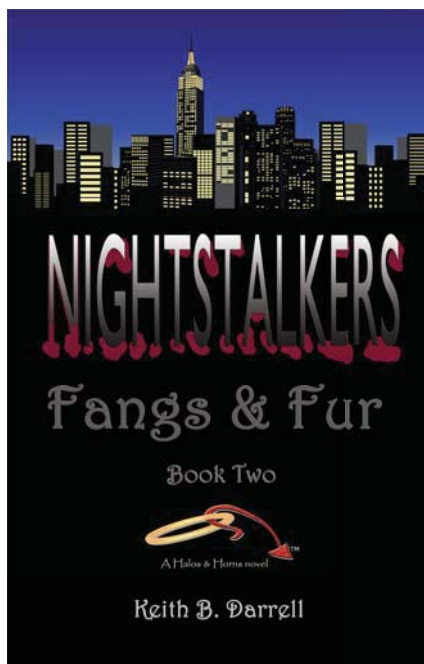
Pandora's a carefree party girl who just happens to be a vampire. With her best friend Sharon Mordecai, a hybrid vampire; her boyfriend Cody Fenris, a werewolf; and Cody's sister Lupe, who transforms into a wolf, they run Nightstalkers, Inc., a private detective agency. Pandora and Sharon also belong to Nosferatu, Inc., a worldwide corporation set up to provide relocation services for vampires, who cannot remain

in one place indefinitely, lest the "breathers" question why they never age. Other Nosferatu members include 10-year-old Artemus, the boy vampire; ex-KGB operative Valentina Petrovna; the maladroit, claustrophobic vampire Claude Gauthier; the vagrant "trampire" Seamus Callaghan; and the corporation's international board of directors: Lady Chiyoko in Japan, Callum in Australia, Isra in Dubai, Amadi in Africa, Magda in Hungary, and its CEO, the mysterious human known only as Remick.

First introduced in the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga, these vampires and lycanthropes have their own stories to tell. These tales in *Flashbacks* shed light on their dark pasts while sowing the seeds for the next two books in the *Fangs & Fur* trilogy. They can be enjoyed as individual vampire and werewolf stories, or read by *Halos & Horns* fans to learn more about the characters populating that saga, or viewed as the prologue to the story about to unfold in the *Fangs & Fur* trilogy.

Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-03-0

THE FANGS & FUR FANTASY SAGA



When a Grigori unwittingly entrusts trouble-prone vampire Pandora with an ancient leather-bound box containing primordial evil, what could possibly go wrong? At least Pandora doesn't know her best friend slept with her boyfriend. Or that her werewolf beau has been targeted for revenge by one of his victims. Her BFF Sharon — the hybrid vampire infused with an angelic life force — has enough to worry

about now that a deranged scientist/occultist is creating his own Frankenstein monster and requires an angelic life force to animate it. He's resurrected the spirit of Jack the Ripper to supply the body parts he needs from Las Vegas prostitutes. Should Kennedy be worried to walk the city streets?

After a Valkyrie whisks the Nightstalkers, Inc. team of private eyes — vampires Sharon and Pandora, and lycanthrope siblings Cody and Lupe Fenris — off to the Otherworld dimension of the Fae to recover Thor's golden gauntlets from the Dark Fae's leader, the Morrigan, the team will be forever changed. And how does that tie in with their new landlord Kitty Bast, an Egyptian cat goddess?

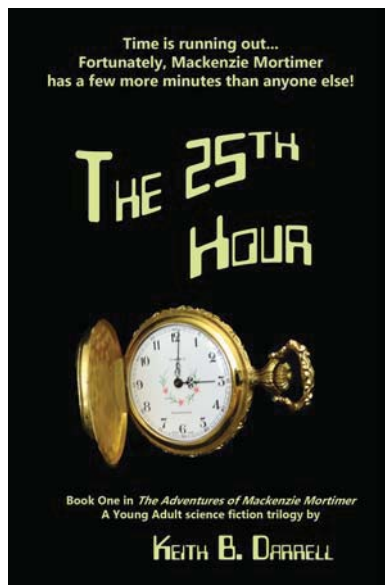
Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-28-3

Available from:

Amazon.com, AmberBookCompany.com

THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER

BOOK ONE

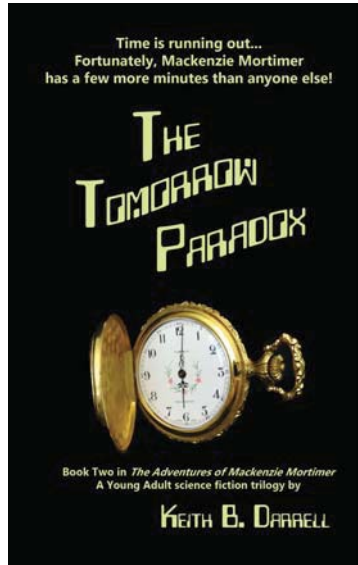


Mackenzie Mortimer is a typical junior high geek: shy, awkward, late with his homework, and always late for class. He's never got enough time to do everything he needs; after all, there are only 24 hours in a day. But when Mac finds his grandfather's pocket watch, he discovers his days have an extra hour. The eccentric inventor's journal reveals the watch can add up to 60 minutes to a single day by freezing time around whomever controls it. Marlene Prentice is Mac's best friend, but he's clueless the tomboy has a crush on him. Mac only has eyes for foxy Vanessa Carlyle, daughter of the town's richest man. When a crisis looms for Mac and his friends, time is running out... but fortunately, Mackenzie Mortimer has a few more minutes than anyone else.

Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-14-6

Available from: Amazon.com, AmberBookCompany.com,
and as an Audible.com audiobook and Kindle e-book

THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER
Book Two



Time is running out... fortunately, Mackenzie Mortimer has a few more minutes than anyone else.

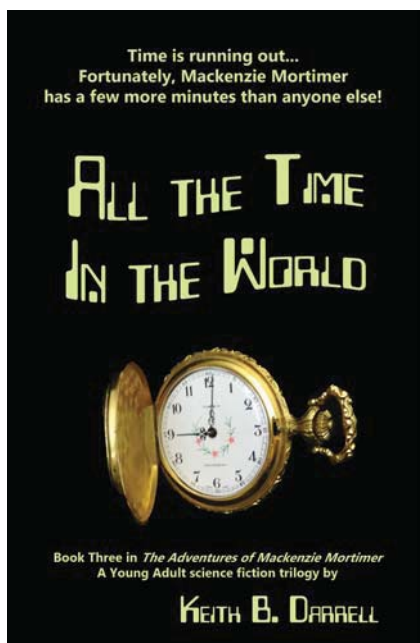
Mackenzie Mortimer's troubles are just beginning! With his pocket watch destroyed, Mackenzie finds himself a stranger in a strange land, surrounded by familiar people he doesn't really know, with only Gemma, a 15-year-old clone, to guide him through the labyrinth of the future. Will the mysterious black, iron key unlock the secrets to returning him home, or is it a harbinger of his impending doom?

Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-25-2

Available from: Amazon.com, AmberBookCompany.com,
and as a Kindle e-book and EPUB e-book

THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER

BOOK THREE



Mac has left Gramps' diary behind in the future and Victoria Carmichael's ex-husband, Jeremy Bentaine, has stolen it along with Gramps' journals. Now, Bentaine Industries seeks to be the sole possessor of time travel technology... and that means eliminating Mackenzie Mortimer before he discovers the pocket watch! But Mac has followed Gramps' trail to WWII Nazi-occupied Belgium, where he must use his future technology to stay alive, locate Gramps, and unite a pair of star-crossed lovers. The horrors of WWII that Mac encounters will change him forever, but if the Bentaine family has its way, forever will be a very short time for Mackenzie Mortimer!

Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-26-9

Available from:

Amazon.com, AmberBookCompany.com

ALSO BY THIS AUTHOR



A 740-page short story collection of raw, cutting edge speculative fiction from one of today's most provocative writers!

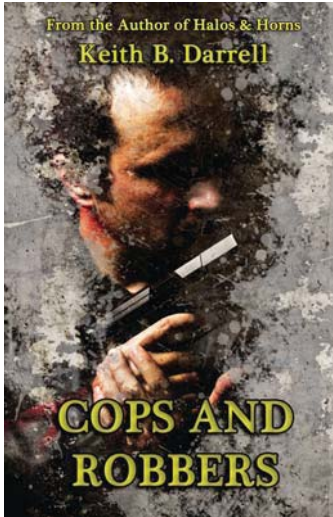
*2013 NIE Awards Finalist
Best Short Story Fiction!*



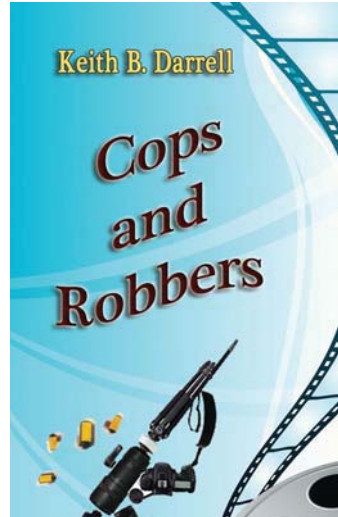
Paperback, ISBN 978-1-935971-23-8

Available from:
Amazon.com, BN.com, AmberBookCompany.com

COPS AND ROBBERS



ISBN 978-1-935971-34-4



ISBN 978-1-935971-33-7

A pair of FBI agents set up a bogus movie production as part of an unlikely sting operation to snare a mob kingpin. They buy the worst script in Hollywood and hire a failed movie producer whose career is on the skids; a third-rate aging actress whose claim to fame is having performed Shakespeare... on a cruise ship; an amphetamine-enhanced screenwriter; a hooker; a Yiddish-speaking accountant; a black, flaming gay actor; and a Native American actor who insists on dressing like an Old West dime store Indian.

However, throughout the course of the film, the mobsters and one of the FBI agents become so enamored by the glitter and glamour of Hollywood that they actually end up working together to try to make the movie a success. Our hero is a hitman in search of the redemption he doesn't believe he deserves. He realizes the fake film was never meant to be produced and develops a conscience believing it's wrong to allow the innocent actors and film crew to spend months of their lives working on a movie no one will ever see, despite the delusions of everyone else involved. Knowing their hopes and dreams will be dashed, our hero sets about trying to do the right thing.