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Premise: A modern scientist lies to the government to get
funding for a time machine he successfully builds and uses,
only to discover the unstable properties of time travel.

Stranded and feeling quite superfluous, I decided to do what I could as an anthropologist and began to observe people. Oh yes, and begging, of course. Having no money, I had to take on the role of a homeless man, which of course, was what I was. However to the locals of the time period, I was a bum.

At one point during my second week of life in 1953, I found myself sitting on a curb, dirty, unshaven, depressed (as would be expected). A young boy, looking a few years older than my 8 year-old self approached me, holding a comic book I vaguely remember reading as a child.

"That's a good one, is it?" I asked.

"Dunno, haven't read it yet. Why?" He asked, eyeing me with some suspicion.

"Just curious." I tried to smile, but pondered just how far my bad breath could be recognized from at that point. The boy didn't seem to mind. "Do you enjoy science fiction, young man?"

"Sure do," He said.

"What's that comic about?"

"It's about lots of stuff--it's an anthology."

"Well, it's sounds like you read a lot."

"Yeah. Books and stuff. Not just comics."

"Read any time travel stories?"

"Sure. Who hasn't? H.G. Wells I think wrote a good Time Machine story."

"Ah, yes."

"You read science fiction?" The boy asked me. I laughed softly.

"Young man, I *am* science fiction." He smiled and opened his eyes wide at me.

"Wow. What do you mean?"

I decided telling a young science fiction fan the truth would do little damage to the proper flow of time. "What would you say, if I told you I was from the future?"

"You're trying to put one over on me, mister!"

"No, and it's not 'mister', it's 'Doctor'. Doctor Jonathan Mason, I'll have you know and I... am a *scientist*."

He stared at me for a moment clearly wondering if he should accept my explanation or except it. Finally he spoke.

"No, you are a *bum*."

"I may be a bum, but I am also a scientist."

"All right, then... if you're really from the future, let me ask you some questions about the future." I decided that would be fair enough. "What year are you from?"

"2005."

"The twenty-first century... wow."

I pulled a five dollar bill from my wallet and showed it to him. He took it and stared at it.

"Whoa. Lincoln's face is huge."

"Yes, it is big isn't it?"

"Can I keep this?"

"No, it's from the future, but it is *still* money."

"You could have just made this up, though..."

"All right, ask me another question about the future--that one was an easy one," I said, taking the bill back from him.

"Okay, what's the farthest planet you've been to?"

I couldn't help but laugh. "*Earth*."

"*EARTH??* That's *this* planet!"

"My, my, you do read."

"You know what I mean old man."

"Please, call me doctor."

"Doctor Old Man."

"Well, go on, ask me another one."

"You didn't finish my last question--if Earth's the only place you've been, what about mankind in general?"

"The moon is as far as humankind has set foot. Probes have been sent to Mars and beyond, but alas, there is no money in manned space flight, so the farthest we go is Earth orbit."

"Earth orbit? That stinks! You're lying!"

"I'm lying because I'm telling you of an uninteresting future? Why would I conjure an uninteresting future? If I truly wanted to lie, why wouldn't I tell you of intergalactic travel and aliens?"

The boy shrugged and sighed. "Well, what about flying cars--what's it like driving one of those?"

I laughed again.

"You don't have flying cars?"

"We do..." I began. He smiled a smile that disappeared with my next sentence. "But there's only one in existence, I believe and I don't think it's legal to fly."

"Well, what about jet packs? Like uh, that Commando Cody guy?"

"Commando Cody? Haven't heard of him."

"No, I mean like rocket men!"

"No, sorry, no rocket men, no jet packs." I was finding an odd joy in depressing him about how boring the future of America was. I watched as he searched his mind for

something else to ask--some glimmer of hope for the exciting, fantastical future of his comic books and science fiction movies. Finally he nodded to himself as though agreeing with a suggestion he had made to himself.

"What about world hunger? You beat that, right?"

"Not at all. In fact, some believe that poor countries are kept poor by things done by the American government and other powerful countries."

"Now, I know you're lying." The boy crossed his arms. "The US of A wouldn't do something like that!"

"Believe what you want, boy. But the future is a rough place."

"Rough place--you don't mean like Armageddon, do you? There aren't mutants around or radiation, is there?"

"No, not, well, not yet. I told you, the future of America is a fairly bland, riskless existence. Like I mentioned earlier, I had to lie to the government to get my funding. If I wasn't also building a killing device and if they knew I was building a time machine, they'd have kicked me off of my own project and used my device for money making purposes."

"But... what about space?" The boy said almost frustrated.

"Oh, well," I began, "it will seem very exciting indeed for a quite a while. We'll compete with the Soviets in getting a man into space and then we'll beat them on the way to the moon. Then there will be Skylab, a tiny space station."

"Tiny?"

"Tiny--very tiny." His face sank again. "Then there's the space shuttle."

"What's that?"

"Reusable space craft. Much more economical than the rockets we will use in the beginning, but still not what I expect you're looking for--passenger liners into space."

"There is?" He spoke before realizing that I said exactly the opposite. "Oh, no passenger liners into space."

"Sorry." The boy seemed to be thinking hard about what I was saying. He also seemed to be believing what I was saying, well, at least in theory. I continued: "So, there will be a great amount of excitement for a decade or so, but then the public begins to lose interest and then there will be less and less talk of humans up there until the late twentieth century when the great steps into the solar system will be taken by machines, not man. And in recent years, there has even been some hushed talk of militarizing space."

His face suddenly went cold and white, his eyes wide.

"I think I'll..." He trailed off and then handed me his comic. "Here, I won't be needing this anymore."

I took the comic book and stared after him as he walked away without another word.

Children are so impressionable. More than I remembered, regardless.

After that, there really wasn't much to do. I thought about asking my father politely for help, but I couldn't imagine why he would be kind to a virtual stranger who was so rude to him. And beyond that, I was fairly certain that wandering the streets hungry and homeless would be more healthy for my mental stability than spending another day in that house with him. I still feel strange talking about him like that knowing how soon he was taken from my life. But he was such a difficult man to deal with. So closed minded. So, self-righteous in his assumptions that he was right and that any further thought or effort was not necessary.