

## FANTASY

# Tomb Bomb

By **Conor McCallum**

8:16 PM

The gravel crackles under the black and white van's tires as the bomb squad files out and stands in formation until I give the signal to proceed. The crunching under our boots is the only sound we hear as we make our way to the freshly built skyscraper. It's one of those fancy new ones where the walls are all glass, leaving little privacy and few hiding places. Once we're in the building, I lead the charge down some dark hallways. The electricity hasn't been installed yet. We make our way up to the fifteenth floor where the message stated the bomb had been placed. The building smells like a hardware store. Everything is too new, and I don't like it.

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On the fifteenth floor, Tillmen and Okawa slide up against the glass door. One advantage of modern architecture is the bomb can't be strapped to the door or we'd see it. I point forwards and make some light clicking sounds, which signals Tillmen to direct his flashlight around the room to confirm no wires are tied to the door. Tillmen joins his right thumb and index finger to signal the coast is clear, and we open the door, exiting the stairwell.

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After a minute of searching, Okawa whistles with two quick bursts then holds a third. Tillmen and I join him, and sure enough a pipe is sitting on an eggshell-white counter. I smile. How simple.

"Ready men?" I ask and they nod.

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*Time freeze.*

I walk towards the now frozen bomb and cut open the caps at

both ends. Why do they think pipe bombs will work on us? Twelve years ago, there was a huge issue of pipe bombs constantly disrupting daily life. I was a simple traffic cop back then and had to deal with the aftermath quite regularly to the point where it just became habit. They weren't very good. Usually someone would just watch a YouTube video and not really understand what they were doing, placing it somewhere that caused very little damage. It was still problematic for a small county like ours, a few hundred miles from the nearest bomb squad.

10:08 PM, 12 Years Ago

One crisp autumn night, I was headed out for patrol in the black and white cruiser. It was old and would never start the first time the key was turned. That night it was being even more troublesome. Finally the car shuddered, and I heard the soft sound of the engine purring to life. It had given in and decided to start. About halfway through whatever 80s rock song had been playing on the radio, a voice that didn't sound like any of the announcers spoke.

"Michael, you have been chosen."

I thought the car was spewing something causing me to hallucinate, but then I noticed it wasn't moving anymore. Neither were the few cars around me or the seagull frozen outside my driver's window. The voice came back.

"Use your power to stop the bombs."

"But why me? Can't you do it?"

"No. I cannot physically touch anything in your world. It is taking all I have to simply grant this power to you," the voice responded.

"What do you mean 'my world'?"

"I'm from a parallel world where the time bomb pranks got out of hand. People started getting good at making them and they caused major damage, even death. Anyway, I don't have much longer. I'm afraid I need to go."

“Wait! You never answered why you picked me!”

My shouts seemed to have been in vain as the voice stopped responding. I realized I could activate this new power by simply thinking *time freeze*.

I followed the voice’s command, and soon the chief realized what I could do. The chief formed a bomb squad with some other rookie traffic cops, with me as the leader.

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I laugh to myself as I empty the contents of the bomb into a yellow metal bucket. It shouldn’t explode without the pressure of the pipe and caps, but we can never be too careful. Once the material is safely in the bucket, I place it on the ground away from us, step back and unfreeze time. Okawa completes his nod and quickly joins Tillmen in staring at the yellow bucket. After a minute of waiting, it doesn’t explode, so I pick it up and we exit the building. Once we’re outside, my nose happily meets the smell of the dirty, grimy city and begs me never to go near a hardware store. We enter the police van, and Okawa and Tillmen begin talking about some football game tomorrow.

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“Michael. Thank you.”

The voice doesn’t sound like Tillmen’s or Okawa’s. I look around and realize time has frozen once again, only this time I had nothing to do with it.

“It’s been a while. You never gave a name.” I look straight forward, unable to decide on a better place to look.

“Sorry. As I said twelve years ago, granting you the ability to freeze time took an immense amount of power, so I was on a time crunch. I just wanted to let you know it seems your power is no longer necessary. I’m offering you the choice of keeping it or losing it.”

“The bomb threat is over? How do you know?” I’m fairly confused at the extent of the voice’s power.

“It isn’t over, likely never will be. With your training it’s very possible you’re able to disarm them without the power, however.”

I can’t answer. If the voice is right, I have no need for the power, but . . . . “I can’t risk Tillmen’s and Okawa’s lives by slipping up while time is unfrozen.”

“Thinking of others before yourself, huh?” The voice sounds as if it’s smiling. “Very well. Thanks for saving your world, Dad.”

I jump a little at that final word, but before I can ask, time has resumed, and Tillmen and Okawa’s conversation continues.