

An Excerpt from
Pirates of Time - Book One
From *The Inventors' Daughter Series*
By Sperry Hunt

Chapter Nine
On with the Show

Authors' Note: The fourteen-year-old daughter of two peculiar inventors, Erin Isabelle Spotsworth, her parents and her best friend Sophie are attending the monthly meeting of the Dream City Inventors Club. The previous chapter introduces the membership including the kindly inventor Sniffy Griffin and his villainous brother, the shady investment broker Roderick. Erin's parents are known city-wide for their bold inventions which all fail spectacularly. Erin's father Gerald is poised to demonstrate his newest and most improbable invention.

Thirty minutes later the guests were seated in the auditorium before a closed curtain waiting for a demonstration of the world's first time machine.

Colonel Flummery twirled his mustache impatiently. "What's this delay about, Spurious?" he grumbled to his companion.

Spurious chuckled. "I expect we'll end up calling Spotsworth's gizmo the Waste of Time Machine," he said.

Seated between her mother and Sophie, Erin worried. What could be taking her dad so long? Had he forgotten something at home? Was the Timearang broken?

Erin smiled and shook her head. Why was she worried at all? Nothing was going to happen. A time machine? Really? She was worked up about an impossible machine built by impractical people.

A moment later the curtain parted revealing her father standing before a microphone. The tan leather Suitcase Timearang stood to his right. To his left was an enormous television monitor facing the audience. Behind him, the Steam Funk Rock Band waited silently at their instruments.

A tall woman in colorful African robes called out from the audience. "Are you going to start with a joke, Gerald?"

“Ah,” said the professor shielding his eyes from an intense spotlight. “Good idea, Mosadi. Does anyone know why the physicist couldn’t stop reading the book on anti-gravity?”

No one answered.

“She couldn’t put it down.”

Laughter and applause erupted from the audience.

“I say,” the professor called out. “Is my daughter out there somewhere?”

“I’m here Dad,” Erin said raising her hand.

“Ah, there you are, Little Duck. Can you possibly give your dad a hand? I’ve forgotten my secret code, and can’t get the blasted thing open.”

Some people laughed. Others grumbled.

Sophie rolled her eyes. “This could be embarrassing,” she whispered to Erin.

“So, what’s new?” Erin said standing up. She jostled past the shifting knees of a dozen inventors. When she reached her dad, Erin stood on her tiptoes and whispered the instructions to him.

“Of course!” he said rather close to the microphone. “Two taps on the right and three on the left.”

The audience roared with laughter. Clearly, shouting secret codes over a loud speaker was very funny business.

Blushing, the professor leaned over the Timearang and made his taps. He quickly grabbed Erin’s hand and leapt backwards pulling her with him. The gizmo sprang upward in flips and flops and thumps and whumps. A moment later it was once again a seven-foot a photo booth with a sign that read “Four Poses for Five Cents.”

“Bravo, Gerald,” Sniffy Griffin shouted.

Erin’s father bowed sweeping one hand before him grandly. The audience applauded wildly. The professor stepped into the Timearang. Erin leaned in behind him and glanced around the walls also covered in tan leather. A computer monitor had been inserted into the left wall. Surrounding the monitor were a dozen brass gages, their needles trembling excitedly near zero. A blue glowing liquid surged through glass tubing that snaked among the gages.

The professor bent down and peered at a jumble of electronics crammed into an opening beneath the monitor. “Oh, bother,” he said. “I forgot to repair the Boomerang Switch, Smidgen.”

“The what switch?” Erin asked.

“That,” he said pointing to a tiny copper clothes pin in the center of the jumble. “Normally that pinches a coin-sized piece of plastic,” he continued. “The plastic keeps the contacts from touching each other. If the journey becomes so rough it threatens machine and passengers, the plastic will fall out and the Timearang immediately returns to where it started from. You wouldn’t have such a thing on your person, would you, Bitlette?”

Erin struggled not to roll her eyes. A plastic coin? On her person? Who –?

Erin had an idea. She held up a finger. “I know someone who does.”

Erin strode over to the band and spoke discretely to one of the musicians. A moment later she returned with the very thing her father needed.

“A guitar pick!” he said kissing his daughter’s cheek. “You’ve saved the day, Photon.”

The professor quickly wedged the pick into the Boomerang Switch.

Just then, a woman’s voice shouted from the audience. “Gerald!”

Erin turned to see an owlish woman in the audience rise to her feet.

Dad pulled the microphone stand closer. “Yes, Lewenda?”

“We can’t hear you, or see what’s going on inside your do-hickey.”

“Ah,” the professor said pulling a mechanical bumble bee from his pocket. The bee had a video camera for a head and a strobe light for a stinger. “This is Bee-atrice, my video assistant.” He whispered something to Bee-atrice then tossed her into the air. Bee-atrice instantly shot about the room filming the audience, who laughed and pointed at their own faces own splashing across the giant screen.

After completing her acrobatics, Bee-atrice returned to hover over the professor’s shoulder filming his actions as he worked.

“On Timearang,” Dad said producing a pointer from his pocket.

The machine made a thin whistle which gradually grew louder and higher in pitch.

“What’s the blue stuff, Gerald?” cried a bald man with a bulbous nose.

“Topaz Bethanol, Charles. I use it in many of my gizmos as a coolant.”

A man with plump lips and a pencil mustache rose to his feet and called out, “What are all those dials about, Gerald?”

The professor moved the tip of his pointer among the dials. “This one measures the contraction of space, Cosmo. This one calculates the degree of warp. And the large one here measures the quantum entanglement upon which my time machine depends.”

“Do you need all this dials?” Cosmo asked.

“Only in development. Not in flight. But they do make the gizmo look super-cool, don’t you think?”

Erin rolled her eyes, as laughter and applause rippled through the audience.

“What are the key components?” Sniffy Griffin shouted.

“My attorney says I mustn’t get too specific, you understand. But I would say they are the two gizmos beneath my feet.”

The professor pointed to the floor of the Timearang. “The Spotsworth Spheroid Worm Drive — patent pending — on the left gives the machine its power. The Spotsworth Eon Ball — also patent pending — is a tiny meson accelerator that sends sticky particles into the plasma around the machine searching for holes in the Time-Space Continuum. According to the learned physicist Constance Boulware, our universe is penetrated by these voids. On the other side of the voids there should be matter the sticky particles can latch on to and —”

“I say, Spotsworth,” shouted Colonel Flummery cupping a hand around his ear. “What the deuce does all this balderdash mean? I mean what’s this to do with time travel?”

“Sorry for being too technical, Colonel,” the professor replied. “Using my Timearang is a bit like casting a hook onto a freight train charging past you. If the hook catches something, you’re a time traveler.”

Roderick Griffin rose from his chair. “Shall we get on with it, then?” he shouted tapping his large, very expensive watch. “Time is money, you know.”

“Time is more than currency, Mr. Griffin,” Erin’s dad said contemptuously. “Time is our home — much more so than where we live. We can always change our surroundings, our location and our friends — even our planet with the right rocket ship. But Time is also our prison. An unscalable wall. A short, narrow pathway we are doomed to walk.”

Professor Spotsworth shifted his gaze from Roderick to the audience at large. “Until, perhaps today, my fellow inventors!” he shouted emotionally.

The crowd exploded in applause and shouts of approval. Bunny rose to his feet hooting. The owlish Lewenda put two fingers to her lips and let out a painfully shrill whistle.

“Why don’t you go back and sit with your mum, Little Bit?” Erin’s father said over the fading pandemonium.

“Good luck, Dad,” Erin said as she walked away.

“With machines like this one, my friends, we are on the verge of a great age of time travel. Masses of people may someday migrate to other times — future and past.”

The room thundered with once more applause.

“You go, Gerald!” yelled Bunny Bunion.

“Onward and upward!” shouted Cosmo.

“Bully for you, Spotsworth!” Colonel Flummery called out.

Taking her seat, Erin watched the monitor inside the Timearang as it was displayed on the huge television. It showed the current date and time above a stack four buttons marked:

[1] Target Date

[2] Destination

[3] Say ‘Number of Days to Recall’ Time or ‘No Recall’

[4] Say, ‘Go’ or ‘Cancel’

Professor Spotsworth pressed button number one.

“What is your target date?” the Timearang asked in an educated female voice that echoed through the auditorium.

“This date in 1716.”

Erin recognized the date as the year Dream City was founded.

The professor pressed the second button.

“What is your destination?” the machine asked.

“Periwinkle Cove on Eugenia Island,” The professor replied.

“Why Eugenia Island?” Lewenda shouted.

“That’s where Hildagard and I had our honeymoon,” Professor Spotsworth said.

“This is so,” whispered Mom patting Erin’s leg.

“Bee-atrice,” Dad said. “Please show Periwinkle Cove.”

The television screen split between the computer monitor and video footage of a tropical cove surrounded by a high bluff lined with lofty coconut palms.

“The Jewel of the Deep Blue Sea,” the professor continued. “Eugenia Island is most famous for being the spot where Captain Darkrunner, the founder of our fair city, spent many happy hours with his crew and his fellow pirate Nell Flanders. Whilst there, Hildagard and I visited Periwinkle Cove. It was beneath the legendary burnt palm that Darkrunner buried his treasure.

Hildi and I became so interested in Darkrunner's exploits, in fact, that we decided to move to Dream City."

"I say, Spotsworth," shouted Colonel Flummery, his hand cupped around one ear. "How does your contraption know where this Periwinkle Cove is?"

"It has excellent GPS, which is, as you all know, our global address system. I've given the Timearang the coordinates, so it can reach a spot one hundred yards into the bush from the bluff. I must say, however, it will be lost when it gets to that *time*, as there were no GPS satellites in 1716. But it shant matter, for it will return to this very spot three seconds after it leaves by our clocks."

Professor Spotsworth pressed the third button.

"Say Number of Days to Automatic Recall or No Recall," the Timearang said.

"One one-hundredth of one day," he replied.

There was a sudden rustle in the crowd as dozens of scientists produced calculators and cell phones from their clothing. A few seconds later Cosmo shouted, "Fourteen point four minutes."

"Just so," Dad said. "That's how long it will linger in the past before returning. Now, ladies and gentleman, below your seats you will find a pair of goggles. Please put them on now."

Roderick Griffin alone remained motionless. Everyone else did as they were told. They knew first-hand what could happen in a Spotsworth experiment: Trees split by bolts of energy. Pulsating clouds of glowing gas drifting across the city. Fifty street lights blown out in an instant.

"When I say the word, 'Go,' stick your fingers in your ears, for five seconds later, there will be a there will be a very bright light followed by a terrific bang as the Timearang reaches warp speed."

"Here we go," Dad shouted rubbing his hands together.

Erin suddenly leapt her feet. "Dad," she shouted.

"I don't mean to be rude, Little Bit," her father said over the speakers. "But this is an awkward moment for us to have a conversation."

"Sorry, Dad," Erin said. "But don't you think you'd better get out of the Timearang first?"

The exploded in hysterics. Tears rolled down Lewenda's face. Mosadi was gasping for air, she was laughing so hard. Even Bunny was near to collapsing on the floor.

Only Colonel Flummery, who seemed confused, and Roderick Griffin, who rolled his eyes, weren't laughing.

Erin’s father stepped out of the gizmo blushing intensely. “Thank you, Small Thing,” he said before turning toward the band. “Drum roll, please,” he said. “And a count-off after I say go please.”

Steam Funk’s drummer nodded then beat an urgent roll on his snare.

The instant Professor said the word “Go,” the drummer shouted, “A one, and a two and a ...” The Timearang began a loud hum. Everyone stuck their fingers in their ears.

Erin held her breath and squinted leaving only a narrow gap between her eyelids to see what would happen a second later.

And what happened was ...