

Stuck in the Past

Screenplay by Robert J Talbot

25 April 2004

Stuck in the Past

Characters

WILLIAM CRANWAY: 30. A local Charters Towers Real Estate agent. Smartly dressed, professional. Very confident.

THOMAS GREY: 20. Young property speculator. Upwardly mobile go-getter, looking to make a quick turnover by restoring old houses. Dresses casually, impatient to get rich.

FELONEUS HEMP: 25. Hippie. Resident of reputedly haunted house. Dresses very '60s, long hair, flared trousers, beads, peace sign. Very 'hip' manner.

SAFFRON STARCHILD: 22. Hippie wife. Dresses same era as husband, friendly and a little 'out-of-it' by all appearances.

NICHOLAS NEUTRON: 40: Ahead-of-his-time mad professor. Wild looking appearance. Pretends to be the ghost of a dead miner.

Synopsis

The story begins when Thomas Grey enters the Real Estate office of William Cranway, wanting to invest in a cheap property with the prospect of renovating as an investment. Thomas asks about the old house in Gill Street that has been disused for several decades. William looks startled when this is suggested, because the whole town knows there is a mystery surrounding the house, and nobody ever goes there.

Thomas is insistent, he wants to look over the property, which has long fallen into the hands of receivers for failed rates payments, but nobody who has ever entered the property to inspect it or look for residents has ever been seen again. William is scared to take him and show him the property. An argument ensues, with Thomas, who is from out-of-town, being sceptical about the rumours and history of the house. William finally, reluctantly agrees.

Arriving at the address, they look at the house from the outside and certainly it has not changed since the '60s at least. The fence and the front of the house is overgrown with vines and bushes. An eerie sense of impending doom takes over William, but Thomas scoffs at his misgivings and forces him to accompany him in through the front gate.

From that moment, everything changes, and in the next few minutes the true nature of the house becomes apparent. They find themselves unable to leave again, and then the residents appear.

All is not as it seems.

1. INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE. DAY

The office is cluttered with papers and books, a filing cabinet. WILLIAM CRANWAY enters with THOMAS GREY.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(ushering Thomas Grey into the office)

Come in Mr Grey, take a seat

THOMAS GREY

(taking a seat)

Thanks Bill. I understand you have some new listings for me, but I still want to see that old place on Gill Street I asked you about before

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(smiling patronisingly)

Mr Grey, Thomas, that house has been disused for years. It would be condemned if anyone was game to go in and inspect it, I'm sure

CONT.

1. INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE. DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

(cutting in)

I know, I've heard all that, but the condition of the place makes it more affordable. It's in the right location, and the right price.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(looking worried, shuffling papers)

But I'm sure you'd like some of these others I have here for you to look at...

THOMAS GREY

No, my mind is made up, I want to see that property, and I want to see it right now, if you don't mind

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(mopping his head with a handkerchief)

All right, I'll give it to you straight. You're from out of town, so you don't know, but people stay clear of that house. They say those who enter that property are never seen again. I really don't want to find out

CONT.

1. INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE. DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

Yes yes, I know, I've heard the rumours, but
you can't seriously believe all that can you?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Well, some things are better left alone. A lot
of people have disappeared in this town, and
they say that house has something to do with it

THOMAS GREY

(rising from his seat, annoyed)

Look, if you don't want my business, I'll go elsewhere.
I really don't have time for superstitious nonsense

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(resignedly)

Oh, all right then, we'll go and look at it, but I'm
sure it's too run down for what you're looking for

2. EXT. GILL STREET. DAY

The two arrive in William Cranway's car, and look at the old house. It is overgrown
with vines and bushes. It looks deserted.

CONT.

2. EXT. GILL STREET. DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

You see, it's very neglected, there's a much better
prospect just around the corner from here

THOMAS GREY

Not so fast, let's go in and have a look

William Cranway gives Thomas Grey a worried look but they get out of the car and walk towards the overgrown front gate.

3. EXT. DAY. INSIDE THE YARD OF THE OLD HOUSE

The two enter the front gate, and immediately notice all of the overgrown vines etc. Are gone. The house looks newer.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(startled)

What's going on? It looks much better now we're
inside. This is impossible. The vines are all gone

THOMAS GREY

(gesturing back through the gate to the road)

Not only that, but look, your car is gone too

CONT.

3. EXT. DAY. INSIDE THE YARD OF THE OLD HOUSE – CONT.

William Cranway tries to go back through the gate, but is stopped by something.

THOMAS GREY

What's the matter?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

I... I don't know. It's like some kind of force
field. I can't get near the gate

THOMAS GREY

Now this is all going too far, you're trying to
scare me. This is just childish

Thomas tries to go through the gate, but is held back. He tries to go over the fence, but can't get near it. A voice from the open front door attracts their attention. It is FELONEUS HEMP.

FELONEUS HEMP

You won't be able to get out that way, man,
we've tried for many years, but it's impossible

CONT.

3. EXT. DAY. INSIDE THE YARD OF THE OLD HOUSE – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(frightened)

Who are you?

FELONEUS HEMP

My name is Feloneus Hemp. My lady, Saffron
Starchild and I bought this house back in April, 1969

WILLIAM CRANWAY

No, you can't be. I have a record of a couple by
that name buying this house back then, but they
haven't been seen since, and anyway you look
younger than me

FELONEUS HEMP

Nothing ages in here, man, it's an ancient curse
that protects this place and preserves all within

THOMAS GREY

(turning back to William Cranway)

All right, that's enough.

CONT.

3. EXT. DAY. INSIDE THE YARD OF THE OLD HOUSE – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

All this is some weird kind of stage-managed
set-up to frighten me off buying this property

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(angrily)

Go on then, let's see you leave

FELONEUS HEMP

Come inside and we'll tell you all we know

4. INT. HOUSE. DAY

Thomas Grey looks around at the old house's interior. SAFFRON STARCHILD
appears in the hallway.

SAFFRON STARCHILD

Ah, some visitors. We haven't had any for quite
some time. Come out to the back verandah and
have a drink. We'll have a nice long chat

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY

Seated on the verandah, William Cranway takes a sip of his drink, and frowns at it.

CONT.

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What kind of a drink is this?

SAFFRON STARCHILD

It's only fruit juice from our trees I'm afraid. We don't get anything much from outside. We have to make everything from what we can produce here

Feloneus Hemp settles down with his own drink.

FELONEUS HEMP

Okay, it's like this. We're trapped here. Have been since April 1969. The ghost tells us there's an aboriginal curse on this land. Hey by the way, are the Beatles still together?

SAFFRON STARCHILD

Yeah, and did they land on the moon yet?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Err, no to the first, and yes to the second, but...
did you say 'ghost'?

CONT.

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY – CONT.

FELONEUS HEMP

Yeah, a real ghost. He's the ghost of a gold miner who died in a mine cave-in, right here, back in 1920. He can get us stuff from the outside, but we can't get out, at least we can but it's too dangerous

THOMAS GREY

You can get out? How?

FELONEUS HEMP

There's a way out through the old mine shaft, but there's some kind of creature that lives down there and the ghost says he eats people. He calls it the Hairy Man

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(looking even more scared)

Has anyone gone down the mine shaft to escape?

CONT.

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY – CONT.

SAFFRON STARCHILD

(coughing)

Everyone but us, but nobody but the ghost
ever comes back.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Yes, and they've never been seen back
outside either. They come in here and are
never seen again

FELONEUS HEMP

That's proof then, the Hairy Man must have
got them

A voice from behind startles them. It is the voice of 'THE GHOST', covered
in white. He affects a mysterious, sad voice.

THE GHOST

That's right, and the same fate will befall
you all, if you try to go down through the
mine shaft.

CONT.

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY – CONT.

THE GHOST

The Hairy Man guards the exit,
and only I can get past him, but no living
being can

Saffron Starchild starts a coughing fit, and has to sit down.

THE GHOST

What ails you, woman?

SAFFRON STARCHILD

It's nothing. I just haven't been feeling
well lately

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(to the hippie couple)

How have you survived all this time?

What do you live on?

CONT.

5. INT. VERANDAH, DAY – CONT.

FELONEUS HEMP.

Luckily we brought seeds with us, so we planted a vegetable garden, and we have chooks, so we have chicken and eggs. We also grow rice. There's rain water, and we make vegetable oil for lighting, and cooking. We're very self sufficient

The ghost leaves, as quietly as he had entered.

6. EXT. DOWNSTAIRS. REAR OF OLD HOUSE - DAY

Feloneus Hemp shows the newcomers the vegetable gardens, and fruit trees.

FELONEUS HEMP

You see man, we have pumpkins, carrots,
and of course, beans. Lots of beans

FENOLEUS HEMP gestures under the house at an old car there, covered in dust.

FELONEUS HEMP

That's our car. We parked it there back in '69
when we first came here. It's been there ever
since. No use to us now

CONT.

6. EXT. DOWNSTAIRS. REAR OF OLD HOUSE, DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

I've been looking outside. Everything looks
so old, it's like a street parade of old cars and
horse carts

FELONEUS HEMP

Hell, man, that's because it's always October
19, 1920 out there. That's what the ghost tells
us anyway. You got the time on you? My
watch stopped working ten years ago.

THOMAS GREY

(looking at his watch)

Yes, it's two fifteen...

FELONEUS HEMP

(interrupting)

Man! What the hell kinda watch is that?

CONT.

6. EXT. DOWNSTAIRS. REAR OF OLD HOUSE, DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

It's a, er, digital... never mind, it would
take too long to explain, and we have to get
out of this mad place

FELONEUS HEMP

Well, as I was going to explain, it's two fifteen
P.M. On the 19th of October 1920. Every day.
After midnight, it will be the 19th of October
1920, all over again. Has been since we got here,
and has been ever since the 19th of October 1920,
when the mine collapsed and killed a lot of miners,
including some aboriginal ones. Some tribal
medicine man put the curse on this place. There's
the old mine shaft over there.

(he gestures toward the backyard)

William Cranway and Thomas Grey look in the direction indicated, and they see the remains of an old mine shaft. Just then, they see the ghost emerge from the shaft. He has something in his hand, and walks over to Feloneus Hemp, handing him a package.

CONT.

6. EXT. DOWNSTAIRS. REAR OF OLD HOUSE, DAY – CONT.

FELONEUS HEMP

What have you got for us from the outside, man?

THE GHOST

I went to the chemist and got some pills, for
Saffron. I had a look at her, and she needs these

FELONEUS HEMP

(taking a bottle of pills out of the wrapping)

Hey, thanks man

Thomas Grey looks at the pill bottle. Feloneus Hemp pats the ghost on the back, and goes upstairs to his wife with the medicine. The ghost then goes off under the house.

7. INT. UNDERNEATH OLD HOUSE. DAY

Using a key in a padlock, the ghost enters a door to an old shed. As he enters and shuts the door, Thomas Grey is seen to be watching his actions from cover. As the ghost closes the door, an eerie sound can be heard. Thomas Grey approaches the shed and can hear the sound faintly from within.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD. DAY

Thomas Grey approaches William Cranway from underneath the house.

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

I saw you follow the ghost. What did you see?

THOMAS GREY

There's something not right. Did you see the
white stuff fly off the ghost when that Feloneus
bloke patted him on the back?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Now that you mention it, yes

THOMAS GREY

Something else

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What?

THOMAS GREY

The date on that packet he handed Feloneus

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What was it?

THOMAS GREY

It was October, 2020

William Cranway looks mystified.

THOMAS GREY

Something else

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What?

THOMAS GREY

There's some kind of weird machine in that shed.

Tell me, how much of the history of this house do
you know?

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Only that it was built early last century, and it was occupied until around 1920

THOMAS GREY

What happened then?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Well now, some professor someone-or-other bought it, but then it remained unoccupied until the council sold it for unpaid rates in 1969, when this hippie couple bought it. But no-one has seen them since. This place gives everyone the creeps

THOMAS GREY

Do you have any information about this professor?

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Only local folklore. They say he was working
on some strange experiment, but he disappeared.
Just like all the rest who've disappeared, I guess

THOMAS GREY

Hmm. Maybe. There's no rumour about what
kind of weird experiment he was conducting,
is there?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(looking embarrassed)

Well, yes, but it's laughable, he was probably
locked up, if the Hairy Man didn't get him.
Ha ha

THOMAS GREY

Try me anyway, what was it?

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(laughing)

Immortality

Thomas Grey appears deep in thought.

THOMAS GREY

We've got to get into that shed

A voice from behind startles them

FELONEUS HEMP

You can't go into the shed. That's one thing
the ghost insists on, and we have to do as he
says, man

WILLIAM CRANWAY

Why? Why do you have to do as he says?

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

FELONEUS HEMP

Hey man, it's not like he's a bad dude or nothin'. He's the only one who can get things from the outside that we need. You just saw what he does for us, and we have to respect his wishes, man

THOMAS GREY

But aren't you curious about what that machine is that makes that weird noise?

FELONEUS HEMP

Sure I am, but hey, we need his help, and we ain't goin' down that mine shaft

THOMAS GREY

(impatiently)

Well, there's no way I want to be here in 35 years' time, living on mung beans and depending on a ghost to keep me from dying.

Come on Bill

CONT.

8. EXT. IN THE YARD, DAY – CONT.

Thomas turns around and heads back under the house to the shed. William follows.

9. INT. AT THE SHED DOOR. UNDER THE OLD HOUSE. DAY

Thomas Grey and William Cranway arrive at the shed door. It is locked from inside.

THOMAS GREY

(to William Cranway)

What was that professor's name, do you
remember?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

I believe it was Nicholas Neutron

THOMAS GREY

(in a loud voice)

Nicholas Neutron, professor, open this door

10. INT. SHED, DAY

NICHOLAS NEUTRON is working on a very complicated looking machine.

CONT.

10. INT. SHED, DAY – CONT.

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

(in a loud voice)

Go away! No-one is allowed in here

11. INT. UNDERNEATH OLD HOUSE, SHED DOOR. DAY

Thomas Grey kicks at the door and it gives way.

12. INT. INSIDE PROFESSOR'S WORKSHOP, OLD HOUSE. DAY

Thomas Grey and William Cranway enter the old shed to find Nicholas Neutron standing beside a machine that is emitting a very strange sound. They approach Nicholas Neutron, but he produces a shotgun.

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

(shouting)

Get back! Back I say!

WILLIAM CRANWAY

All right, whatever you say. Do as he says,

Thomas

CONT.

12. INT. SHED, DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

(to Nicholas Neutron)

There's no aboriginal curse, is there? No

Hairy Man in the mine shaft either, is there?

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

Right on both counts, young man. It's not

even a mine shaft. It's a time vortex passage

to the outside world

WILLIAM CRANWAY

(gesturing to the machine)

What does that thing do?

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

It's a Temporal Static Generator. I invented

it back in 1920. My colleagues understood

only one percent of what I was doing, because

they had only limited imaginations. I continued

with my studies and developed a whole new

science.

CONT.

12. INT. SHED, DAY – CONT.

They thought I was mad and tried to
have me locked up. They said it was dangerous,
but they hardly understood a fraction of it.
Such ignorance!

WILLIAM CRANWAY

So this machine makes time stand still?

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

Yes. So far I haven't been able to extend
its range beyond one hundred years, but
I'm working on it

THOMAS GREY

And that's why the escape tunnel comes
out on October 19th 2020? Because you
started this machine on October 19th 1920,
right?

Nicholas Neutron looks at Thomas Grey, impressed.

CONT.

12. INT. SHED, DAY – CONT.

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

That's very good, young man, I appreciate your quick
mind, but I'm afraid I'll still have to shoot you both

William Cranway also looks at Thomas Grey, winks and glances towards a sledgehammer nearby. Thomas catches the look. A voice from behind Nicholas Neutron makes him turn towards the door. Feloneus Hemp and Saffron Starchild are there, they have heard the conversation.

FELONEUS HEMP

But why, man? Why keep us here all this
time? Why all the stories about the Hairy
Man and the aboriginal curse, and you bein'
a ghost and all that?

NICHOLAS NEUTRON

(sounding desperate)

To keep you here, my friends. So I wouldn't
be alone. All the others could have stayed too.
I wanted them to. We can all live here forever...

SAFFRON STARCHILD

You're quite mad, aren't you?

CONT.

12. INT. SHED, DAY – CONT.

William Cranway suddenly lunges at Nicholas Neutron, knocking the shotgun out of his hands, and struggling to restrain him. Thomas Grey grabs up the sledgehammer and smashes the machine with it. The weird sound and all movement stops. Nicholas Neutron screams and begins to age, his hair goes white, his skin wrinkles. Finally he drops out of William Cranway's arms to the floor of the workshop, and is soon nothing more than dust and a skeleton.

A scream from the doorway. William Cranway and Thomas Grey turn to see a much older hippie couple standing there.

SAFFRON STARCHILD

(crying)

We're old, Feloneus. We're in our fifties

FELONEUS HEMP

(with a growing smile)

Hey yeah, man, just like we oughta be, and
we're free now. Look outside, it's the modern
world

14. INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE. DAY

William Cranway is again at his office desk, and Thomas Grey is seated nearby.

WILLIAM CRANWAY

So you're not interested in that old house
any longer?

CONT.

14. INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE, DAY – CONT.

THOMAS GREY

No, I've had enough of that place, but I just realised something

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What?

THOMAS GREY

All those people who went missing, presumed dead? The ones who went down the mine shaft, trying to escape?

WILLIAM CRANWAY

What about them?

THOMAS GREY

All the cops, and council workers, Jehovah's Witnesses and burglars? They're all going to pop up out of that escape tunnel on October 19th, 2020

The End