

Rivers of Time

FADE IN:

EXT. THE LATE TRIASSIC - DAY

Sunlight falls upon a scattering of cycads and seed-ferns around a large standing pool of water—an oasis amid an arid landscape glimpsed just beyond the vegetation. In this stillness no birds sing—because no birds yet exist.

SUPERIMPOSED/BOTTOM: THE TRIASSIC - 225 MILLION YEARS AGO.

A rat-like mammal (a MEGAZOSTRODON, six inches long) creeps warily to the pool's edge—hesitates, then begins to drink.

Suddenly, a long thin snout flashes from the dark water—crocodilian jaws CLAMP shut on the mammal—a five-foot-long RUTIODON (resembling a caiman) flounders onto shore. A beat.

Then, without warning, the fanged jaws of an ERYTHROSUCHUS swoop down from above and engulf the young Rutiodon.

The bulky 15-footer up-ends the croc and swallows it, till only its tail sticks out—then that, too, is engorged.

At the SOUND of a cracking twig, the Erythro turns. With a ROAR half bellow, half bird-screech, it charges on four legs through the shallow water, toward the far end of the oasis.

BLAM! A large red hole appears over the Erythro's heart. The reptile is momentarily slowed, but keeps moving.

BLAM! A second wound near the first. The beast takes a last faltering step—falls dead, half-in, half-out of the pool.

FLETCHER (O.S.)

I got him! I got him!

Three armed men in safari garb approach the carcass. TIMOTHY FLETCHER (50s), overweight, puffing, hefts a smoking, double-barreled Continental .600 rifle, like those the others carry.

ALEX BLACKELK (40ish), a burly Sioux, keeps an eye out for predators. He moves gracefully despite his size.

Clearly in charge is REG RIVERS (mid-30s), ruggedly handsome, cut from the same cloth as the great hunters of legend—an Allan Quatermain for the early 21st century.

FLETCHER

See, Rivers? I told you I'd get one first try!

RIVERS

And I told you to hold your fire. That's an Erythrosuchus.

FLETCHER

An Ery-what?

ALEX

You paid to shoot a Teratosaur—just the size head to mount over your fireplace, you said.

FLETCHER

You mean that's not--?

Alex kicks the carcass' head as if it were a car's tire.

ALEX

A Terato's a lot faster and meaner, and walks on two legs.

RIVERS

(looking O.S.)

Like that.

A ROAR O.S. louder than the Erythro. Alex and Fletcher whirl.

A 25 feet-long TERATOSAURUS lopes across the arid landscape outside the oasis--it spots the humans.

Rivers grins wryly at the gaping Fletcher.

RIVERS

(continuing)

He's all yours, Mr. Fletcher.

Fletcher raises his rifle, aims, fires. CLICK! Nothing.

FLETCHER

It's jammed! You shoot it!

The ROARING Terato charges--

Alex, rifle ready, glances anxiously from Rivers to the Terato. Rivers raises his .600 slowly, getting it in his sights as if he had all day. To Fletcher:

RIVERS

Your call. But if I do, that counts as your trophy head.

Fletcher impulsively deflects Rivers' rifle barrel downward.

FLETCHER

Like hell it does!

RIVERS

Then this safari is officially over.

Alex heads through the vegetation bordering the pool. Rivers shoves Fletcher, to start his petrified client moving.

The Teratosaur charges in after them, ROARING.

BORDERING THE POOL

The trio flee through the ferns and cycads--Alex sure-footed in the lead, Fletcher terrified. Rivers moves like a cat, unhurried. Neither Rivers nor Alex glances back.

Fletcher, looking over his shoulder, stumbles. Alex hauls him up and pulls him along. Rivers looks back...

The ROARING Terato's much closer now. Rivers CALLS OUT:

RIVERS

Meet you back at the point!

He stomps off through a shallow part of the pool—stops, and FIRES into the air.

RIVERS (cont'd)

Hey, Toro!

The Terato pursues Rivers through the pool, ROARING, knocking vegetation aside. Smaller reptilians scatter out of its path.

As he runs, Rivers SHOUTS back insults at the pursuing Terato.

Meanwhile, Alex drags Fletcher along, as fast as he can.

On the far side of the pool, Rivers pauses a moment to get his bearings—then alters direction slightly. A beat later, the Terato stalks in his footsteps, ROARING.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEMI-DESERT LANDSCAPE

Away from the oasis, only a few primitive shrubs grow. Nothing stirs but insects and a pair of two-foot SALTOPUS dinosaurs fighting over the carcass of a third.

An odd HUM rises—the reptiles scuttle off. There's a sudden BLURRING amid thin air—then a SHIMMER OF LIGHT, like a heat wave over asphalt. The tiny blurred speck quickly radiates outward in all directions.

The CHRONO-CUBE materializes in the blink of an eye—a metal-frame Time Machine with side-panels made of transparent plastiglass. It sits gleaming in the Sun like a high-tech elevator—and looking totally out of place.

BRUCE COHEN, the Chamber Operator, 30ish, in safari gear, breathes a SIGH of relief at his safe arrival. He looks around, sees no one—but he spies the oasis 100 feet away.

Bruce checks his futuristic-looking watch (which matches the ones worn by Rivers and Alex)—shakes his head disapprovingly.

The Terato's ROAR splits the air. Bruce looks around anxiously, hands moving instinctively to the control panel.

Suddenly, Alex and Fletcher erupt from the cycads, headed his way. Bruce's relief is palpable—he presses a key on his keyboard and the front panel opens. Alex shoves Fletcher ahead of him into the Chrono-Cube.

BRUCE

Where's Rivers?

Before Alex can answer, Rivers emerges on the run from the vegetation on the other side of the pool—he races to the Cube and into it.

RIVERS

I took the scenic route.

Bruce starts to comment, but a new ROAR drowns his words. He sees the BELLOWING Terato emerge from the cycads. He gapes.

RIVERS (cont'd)

Back to the future, Bruce.

BRUCE

You got it!

Bruce operates the keyboard—the HUMMING begins anew. Rivers and Alex aim rifles at the Terato through the closing plastiglass.

The Terato spies the Cube, ROARS, charges.

RIVERS

If we have to shoot through the panels, we're in trouble. Wait till the last second.

ALEX

What the hell do you call this?

RIVERS

The next-to-the-last second.

They hold their guns steady as the Terato gets ever nearer—

Now it looms above the Cube, its sharklike jaws gaping wide.

Bruce is really working the keyboard now, too scared to glance up. Rivers and Alex hold their aim steady.

The Terato's jaws clamp down around the top of the Cube. Just then, there's a SHIMMER OF LIGHT around the Cube—

—and the Terato and its world WINK OUT OF EXISTENCE! The Cube stays where it was in CENTER OF FRAME, but both Terato and arid landscape vanish, to be instantly replaced by—

INT. CHRONO-LAB #1 - DAY

The Chrono-Cube (with its passengers) now occupies the exact center of a high-tech lab. It's suspended equidistant from spherical walls above, below and on every side—as if this were the heart of a hollow steel basketball 100-feet in diameter.

What holds the Cube in place is a half-dozen energy-conducting metal spokes which lead to it from walls wholly covered by functional-looking, computeresque apparatus.

The Chrono-Cube is like a gleaming metal-and-glass spider in the center of a silvery techno-web.

SUPERIMPOSED BRIEFLY: FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

Rivers leads the way across an elevated walkway to a control ledge where PROF. GUNTHER PROCHASKA (60s) sits shutting down blinking lights on his mainframe. Alex helps Fletcher, who's doubled over with dry heaves. Bruce looks back in disgust:

BRUCE

Another would-be hero upchucks all over my nice clean Chrono-Cube...

FLETCHER

I—want my money back. I didn't get my dinosaur—and I feel sick...

RIVERS

It'll pass.

ALEX

Time travel's a bit like being in an elevator that drops ten stories and jerks to a halt.

They reach Prochaska.

ALEX (cont'd)

Yo, Professor, why the long face? We've brought your precious "Wayback Machine" home safe and sound again.

PROCHASKA

But Bradford and Hamlin didn't.

Rivers and Alex react.

RIVERS

Something go wrong with their safari?

Prochaska gestures to Fletcher; this isn't for an outsider's ears. He leads all four out a thick metal door which slides into the wall. Alex hands Fletcher over to a reluctant Bruce.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Outside the door (marked "1"), they face one marked "2," which is slightly dented, as if pushed by great forces within. Rivers and Alex react to this, puzzled. As Bruce helps Fletcher down the corridor toward a third metal door some yards distant, Prochaska motions Rivers and Alex to drop back.

PROCHASKA

You know Bradford and Hamlin had taken three clients back to the Pleistocene a week ago, in Cube #2.

RIVERS

Hunting mastodon.

PROCHASKA

Rodriguez was anchoring this end. Just before they were due to re-materialize, he buzzed me he was getting weird readings from the time stream.

ALEX

What kind of readings?

PROCHASKA

As if the Cube were stopping in various eras, each time for a fraction of a second—like a rock skipping across a pond, and gradually slowing down—losing momentum.
(uses hand gestures)

And then—

He uses a palm code to open #2 Door. As they enter, Rivers and Alex exchange a glance that says: What's up?

INT. CHRONO-LAB #2 - DAY

The three men stand on a CREAKING, badly damaged ledge inside a spherical lab identical to the first, except that all hell has clearly broken loose here—and recently.

PROCHASKA

Then—this.

Where a Chrono-Cube should be are only twisted shards of metal—broken spokes dangle—both mainframe and high-tech wall are in ruins—splashes of bright red spatter the walls.

ALEX

My God...

The ledge sways, CREAKING ominously. Alex looks down, uneasy.

PROCHASKA

They're all dead, and this is all that remains of my other Transporter.

RIVERS

Bradford and Hamlin... I wasn't their biggest fan, but they didn't deserve to wind up as wallpaper.

PROCHASKA

Worry about yourselves. The media's got hold of the story.

He exits. Rivers and Alex exchange a look. Just as they step off the swaying ledge, it collapses, CRASHING far below.