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# **The Time Cellar**

Marc Emory



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Robert Packard, born in Los Angeles in 1974, love-starved wine nerd, frustrated physicist, and over-qualified gofer for a California law firm in the year 2010, suddenly gets two accidental windows to the past: Château Lafite in 1860, and Monticello, Virginia in 1818. They appear courtesy of the proverbial "Dark and Stormy Night." Not yet knowing if animate beings can cross through unscathed, he enlists the help of a local coin expert, and obtains the vintage coins to buy impossibly fresh wine from the Bordeaux vineyards in 1860 and "30 year old" wine from the 18th century directly from the cellar of his new friend, Thomas Jefferson. Hearing Robert is from California, and knowing only the geography of 1818, Jefferson compliments Robert on his English ("You speak impeccable English for a Mexican"). Robert has some history to fill in. Fluent in French, Robert also falls in love with a 28 year old vineyard worker's daughter in 1860 Bordeaux, France, born in 1832 ("You may start in with the 'older woman' comments any time"), but doesn't know if it's safe to go visit her in person. She helpfully offers the involuntary services of "Minou" to test the portal's tolerance of animate beings. Robert (now "Ro-BAIR") sells the rare vintage wine from his non-existent secret "cellar" to a crooked expert whose shop is on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, and becomes an instant multi-millionaire. This brings with it the irritating consequences of a visit from the IRS, divorce proceedings from his soon-tobe ex-wife, and credible threats from thugs hired by the wine dealer, who can't stand not knowing the true owner of Robert's fabulous wine cellar. Coping as best he can, Robert's only friends are a 75-year-old retired Thomas Jefferson, his genius Guatemalan assistant Juanita Chang (whose ex taught her Cantonese), her brother, who knows the secrets of "maa shalats," whatever that might be, and the owner of the local rare coin shop. Robert gets a crash course in rare coins, 21st century legalities, and 19th century rural French etiquette. His wit and humor sustain him through his journey from contented mediocrity to sudden wealth and danger, with a surprise appearance by the Little Old Lady From Pasadena, who turns out not to be from anywhere near Pasadena. His wild whirlwind journey through a few dozen changes in life culminate in a surprise ending that is anything but obvious. Readers are offered fair warning from none other than Spider-Man creator, Stan Lee: "Hey, Marc-I hate you! Now I can't even look at a glass of wine without thinking of your furshlugginer story!!!"

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