

The book cover features a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark t-shirt, holding a white folder. She is standing in a dimly lit room with a warm light source on the left and a dark, textured wall. A handgun is visible in the bottom right corner.

Quantum Detective The Alice Chen Files

**Book 6 in the Ethan Reeves
Werewolf Detective Series**

Rae Stonehouse

Quantum Detective: The Alice Chen Files

Reality Isn't Breaking. It's Being Rewritten.

Welcome to Quantum Detective: The Alice Chen Files.

A Note Before You Begin:

If you've read Ethan Reeves' previous cases, something will feel different here. The supernatural world he once navigated has been partially overwritten by quantum phenomena. This isn't an error—it's the result of unauthorized temporal manipulation disrupting reality itself.

Detective Alice Chen is a natural temporal sensitive whose consciousness bridges multiple probability streams. She can perceive both the supernatural world Ethan knows and the quantum patterns now emerging. Through her eyes, you'll witness how these realities overlap, intersect, and collide.

The Investigation:

Time is breaking. Anderson's network has weaponized temporal manipulation, creating devices that don't just pick reality's locks—they shatter them entirely. Now cascade failures ripple through Daybridge, erasing Tuesdays, fragmenting identities across timelines, and turning victims into quantum ghosts trapped between moments.

Detective Alice Chen perceives the temporal chaos others can't see. Ethan Reeves joins the Temporal Response Unit, chasing Anderson's followers through fractured time. And somewhere in the quantum static, a figure in a brass mask coordinates attacks that make reality itself scream.

The dead body can wait. The temporal tsunami building around Daybridge cannot.

Turn the page. Time is already running out.

— **Rae Stonehouse - Author**

THE ETHAN REEVES WEREWOLF DETECTIVE SERIES

Detective Ethan Reeves hides a supernatural secret: he's a werewolf. His heightened senses help him solve cases others can't—but his dual nature may be his greatest liability.

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Free Sample:

Quantum Detective: The Alice Chen Files

Prologue: A Present Shadow

The dead body could wait. That thought alone should have alarmed Detective Alice Chen, but the wrongness pulsing through the abandoned warehouse demanded her full attention. Her breath crystallized in the November air, forming patterns that seemed to linger too long, defying the natural order of things. The warehouse loomed before her, a decrepit monument on the edge of the industrial district, its shadows moving in ways shadows shouldn't.

Something was wrong with the air – it felt thin, stretched like cellophane over forgotten furniture, vibrating with an energy that made her teeth ache. She'd felt temporal disturbances before, but this... this was like standing at the edge of a temporal tsunami.

“Detective Chen?” Officer Wilson's voice cracked with nervous energy. “The coroner's en route. Should we proceed with—”

Alice raised her hand sharply, cutting him off. The younger officer's radio crackled with static, its frequency distorting as reality rippled around them. The warehouse facade flickered like a corrupted digital image – grimy windows suddenly pristine, rusted metal gleaming new, decades of decay reversing in heartbeats before snapping back.

“Stand back,” she ordered, drawing her service weapon more from instinct than necessity. The familiar weight of the 9mm offered little comfort against the forces warping the fabric of time itself. “Nobody crosses this threshold.”

The temporal distortion hit without warning, a psychic sledgehammer that dropped her to her knees. The warehouse dissolved like smoke in a wind that smelled of lightning and regret. Suddenly, she was walking the halls of the Police Academy – no, she was watching

herself walk those halls, a younger Alice Chen with midnight hair pulled back in a severe bun and arms laden with case files. The dissociation was nauseating, like being simultaneously actor and audience in a play she'd performed years ago.

"You're late again, Cadet Chen!" The voice shattered through her like broken glass. Detective Denise Thompson materialized at the end of the corridor; her mentor's presence was so vivid that Alice could smell her signature lavender perfume mixing with gun oil. Five years dead, but here she stood, arms crossed, dark eyes twinkling with that familiar mix of exasperation and pride.

"Sorry, Detective," young Alice stammered, and present-day Alice mouthed the words along with her past self, remembering the weight of those files, the burn of ambition. "I was reviewing the Robertson case files and—"

Reality convulsed. The academy's polished floors fractured, bleeding into the warehouse's crumbling concrete. Thompson's image stuttered like damaged film, her features dissolving into static before reforming into Officer Wilson's concerned face. Past and present collided, temporal feedback howling in Alice's skull.

"Detective?" Wilson's voice echoed strangely, as if traveling through water and decades simultaneously. "Jesus, you're bleeding..."

Alice touched her upper lip, fingers coming away red. She forced herself upright, using the doorframe for support as she holstered her weapon. The temporal echo was fading, leaving behind the taste of ozone and ancient copper pennies, along with something else – a metallic flavor she recognized from previous encounters with manipulated time. But this was stronger, more deliberate. This wasn't some random temporal anomaly; this was orchestrated.

"Call it in," she ordered, already pulling out her phone to text Ethan. Her fingers left bloody smears on the screen. "Tell dispatch we need PDU support immediately. Priority One temporal incident." She turned to Wilson, seeing an echo of Thompson in his worried expression. "Nobody enters this building until they arrive. Something's actively manipulating time in there, and we're not equipped to handle it."

Her reflection in the warehouse windows fractured into multiple versions of herself – academy cadet, rookie cop, seasoned detective – before settling back into her current self. But for a moment, she could have sworn she saw a version she didn't recognize, older perhaps, or from a timeline that hadn't happened yet.

Time wasn't just broken here – it was being weaponized. Whatever entity was powerful enough to tear holes in reality had chosen this location, this moment, with deliberate purpose. The dead body inside suddenly seemed less like a crime scene and more like bait.

Alice pulled out her notebook, hands steady despite the psychic aftershocks still reverberating through her consciousness. She had work to do. The corpse might be able to wait, but whatever was fracturing time around it wouldn't. And she had a sickening feeling that this was just the beginning – that somewhere in the twisted temporal currents surrounding her, Denise Thompson's murder and this moment were connected by more than memory.

The warehouse door creaked on its hinges, pushed by a wind that smelled of the past and future colliding. Alice took a deep breath and stepped forward, into whatever nightmare waited within.

Chapter 1: Split Focus - Present Day

Episode 1: The Transfer

Ethan stared at the cardboard box on his desk, already half-filled with five years of memories from the Paranormal Defense Unit. A chipped coffee mug with the PDU logo. Case files he'd need to hand over. The framed photo from last year's department picnic, taken before the Anderson case turned his world sideways. The familiar weight of his service weapon felt different today—heavier, maybe. Or maybe that was just the guilt.

His phone buzzed again. Alice. Third missed call today. The screen lit up with their smiling faces from last summer's vacation in Maine. The timestamp read 2:47 PM, then flickered to 2:46 PM—a tiny temporal anomaly, the kind TRU dealt with daily. The kind that, left unchecked, could unravel entire neighborhoods. Just last week, TRU had contained a cascade failure that nearly erased Tuesday afternoon from half of Daybridge.

Officer Torremar paused by his desk; arms full of files. “So, it's true then? Transferring to the time cops?” Her attempt at humor fell flat. “They lost three agents last month when that temporal loop collapsed downtown. And that was a routine containment.”

“Not now, Torremar.” Ethan carefully wrapped the photo frame in newspaper. The temporal stabilization unit on his new TRU badge pulsed faintly—standard issue for a department that navigated chronological disasters for a living. Time slips. Paradox zones. Reality breaks. And now, increasingly frequent reports of deliberate temporal manipulation.

The glass walls of Captain Dixon's office seemed to darken as Ethan approached. Through the transparent panels, he could see the captain's collection of paranormal artifacts—including a quantum-locked box containing temporal fragments from unsolved cases. Inside, Dixon sat rigid behind his desk, a stern expression carved into features weathered by two decades of paranormal enforcement.

"Temporal Response Unit needs experienced officers," Dixon said, not looking up from Ethan's transfer papers. "Especially after what happened with the Anderson case. Your... unique perspective could be valuable there."

"Sir, about Anderson—" The name caught in Ethan's throat. Three weeks ago, he'd watched a man step backward through time, dismantling his own murder victims moment by moment. When they finally caught him, Anderson had smiled and said, "Time isn't what you think it is, Detective Reeves. Ask your friends at TRU."

"Closed. Along with your time here." Dixon's pen scratched across the final line. "Report to TRU at 0800 tomorrow. They're investigating a series of temporal signatures matching Anderson's victim pattern."

Through the glass, Ethan could see his box of belongings waiting on his now-former desk. Officer Rivera from PDU was already there, her quantum detection unit humming softly. The device's display showed spreading temporal distortions across the city map—each one a potential catastrophe waiting to happen.

As Ethan turned to leave, Dixon spoke again. "Reeves. What you saw Anderson do... no one should have to witness that. But TRU deals with temporal violations every day. Are you sure you're ready?"

Ethan's hand paused on the door handle. The images flashed again—Anderson's victims reassembling from scattered moments, their final screams playing backward through time, the horrible realization that someone could weaponize time itself.

"Thank you, sir," he managed, and stepped out into his new future.

His phone buzzed one final time as he reached his desk. Alice again. This time, he picked up.

"Where have you been?" Her voice was tight with worry and something else—anger, probably. "I had to hear about your transfer from Rivera? TRU, Ethan? After what happened to their last response team?"

"Alice, I—"

“Don’t. Just... don’t.” He could hear her taking a deep breath. “You’re pushing me away. Ever since Anderson, you’ve been different. And now this? Running off to chase temporal anomalies?”

“I’m not running,” he said, but even he didn’t believe it. “I saw what he did, Alice. What he could do with time itself. TRU needs—”

“What about what I need?” The line went quiet for a moment. “Dinner. Tonight. You owe me that much. And you better have one hell of an explanation.”

The line went dead. Ethan stared at his phone as Spooner approached, her temporal scanner beeping urgently.

“Ready to go, Reeves? We’ve got a Level Three temporal distortion forming at Central Station. Welcome to TRU.”

Episode 2: New Beginnings

The TRU facility gleamed with chrome and humming quantum equipment, a stark contrast to PDU’s worn linoleum and coffee-stained desks. Temporal containment fields shimmered along every doorway, standard protocol since the Garrison Street incident where a rookie had tracked chronal particles through three departments. The air itself felt different here—charged, as if the building existed slightly out of sync with normal time.

Senior Officer Rachel Spooner’s scowl made it clear exactly what she thought of PDU transfers. Her tactical vest bore the scars of temporal enforcement: a crystallized patch where time had frozen mid-explosion, a sleeve permanently wrinkled from passing through a compression field. The quantum stabilizer at her hip pulsed with a steady blue light—the only steady thing about TRU operations.

“Listen carefully, because I won’t repeat myself,” she said, gesturing to a wall of sophisticated monitoring devices. Holographic displays showed Daybridge’s temporal topology: hot spots in red, stable zones in green, and the worrying purple zones where reality had started to thin. “These detect temporal anomalies down to the microsecond. One mistake with these, one missed reading, and you could erase someone from existence.”

She tapped a screen showing Central Station’s platforms. “See these patterns? Classic signs of intentional temporal manipulation. Like your friend Anderson’s work, but more refined.” Her eyes narrowed. “That’s why you’re here, isn’t it? Chasing ghosts through time?”

Ethan's new badge felt foreign against his chest, its quantum core humming in harmony with the building's temporal fields. His old PDU badge had been worn smooth by years of service. This one's edges were still sharp, like the cutting-edge technology surrounding him. The temporal stabilization unit built into the badge's center could theoretically protect him from chronological displacement—theoretically being the operative word.

“Standard loadout,” Spooner continued, opening a locker. Inside, the equipment made his PDU gear look ancient. “Quantum tether—keeps you anchored to your original timestream. Temporal dispersion grenades. Paradox detector. Causality stabilizer.” She pulled out what looked like a standard service weapon. “And this? Chronological disruption pistol. For when things get really bad.”

“Define ‘really bad,’” Ethan said, examining the weapon. Its power core pulsed with the same rhythm as his badge.

Spooner's expression darkened. “Last month, we lost Philips and Coffey in a temporal cascade. Their bodies are still there, frozen in the moment of impact, but their consciousness...” She shook her head. “Time isn't just another dimension to police, Reeves. It fights back.”

The facility's alarm system chose that moment to scream to life. Red warning lights painted the chrome walls in blood tones as temporal distortion readings spiked across every monitor.

“Multiple anomalies detected,” an automated voice announced. “Temporal incursion at Central Station, Platform Seven. Causality breach imminent.”

Spooner was already moving, muscle memory developed from countless similar alerts. “Time to see what you're made of, Reeves. Grab your gear.”

Ethan checked his new weapon, the quantum tether, and the stabilization fields. Everything hummed with barely contained temporal energy. In PDU, they'd chase monsters, ghosts, things that went bump in the night. Here, they chased something far more dangerous—time itself.

“One more thing,” Spooner said as they rushed toward the response vehicles. “When we get there, if you see yourself? Run the other way. Temporal duplicates never end well.”

The vehicle's engine roared to life, its temporal shielding creating a bubble of stable time around them. Through the windshield, Ethan could see the city skyline—and above it, the first visible signs of a temporal storm brewing.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Alice. But there was no time for explanations now. Time waited for no one, especially not TRU officers.

Episode 3: Growing Distance

The missed dinner reservation at Castellano's felt like a metaphor. 7:00 PM came and went twice—a minor temporal hiccup that only TRU's sensors detected—but Ethan missed both iterations. Alice's favorite wine, a 2018 Barolo she'd been saving for tonight, sat going warm on their kitchen counter. His hurried apology text arrived at 7:05 PM: "Temporal incursion at the old factory. Anderson copycat. Rain check?"

The TRU alarm had blared through his first night shift, his quantum tether immediately pulsing with warning lights. The device—a sleek band around his wrist that looked deceptively simple—projected a localized field that should keep him anchored to his original timeline. 'Should' being the operative word. They'd found Phillips' tether last month, still actively protecting a space where its owner had once existed.

"Level Four breach," Spooner had announced. "Temporal signature matching Anderson's MO. Multiple victims trapped in decay loops."

The words sent him running, memories of the Anderson case flooding back. The bodies they'd found, aging and de-aging in endless cycles. Victims trapped in their final moments, experiencing death again and again as Anderson manipulated their personal timelines. The worst had been the Jensen girl—frozen at three different ages simultaneously, her timeline fractured beyond repair.

The factory breach proved worse than expected. His tether's charge dropped to critical levels as they fought to contain the temporal distortions. The device could only maintain temporal stability for six hours before requiring a recharge—a limitation that had cost lives before. When it malfunctioned, Ethan found himself trapped in accelerated time, experiencing three hours while only minutes passed outside. The sensation of time slipping around him, reality becoming fluid, reminded him too much of Anderson's laugh during interrogation: "Time is a cage, Detective Reeves. I just learned how to pick the lock."

By the time they'd stabilized the breach, his phone showed seven missed calls and one text from Alice: "Don't bother coming to Castellano's. Already home." The timestamp kept shifting between 7:46 PM and 7:53 PM—residual temporal instability from the factory, or perhaps his own timeline struggling to realign.

When he finally made it home at 3 AM, their dog Max greeted him with accusing eyes. The German Shepherd's fur stood on end—a reaction to the quantum field still emanating from Ethan's tether, or perhaps to the way his timeline didn't quite match the house's anymore.

Spooner had explained how temporal enforcement gradually shifted officers slightly out of sync with normal time. “It’s why most TRU agents end up divorced,” she’d said. “Hard to maintain a relationship when you’re literally living at a different speed.”

The note on the refrigerator was brief: “Fed Max. Leftovers in microwave. We need to talk.” Her handwriting was precise, controlled—Alice in detective mode, building a case. The microwave displayed 9:47 PM, though it was actually 3:13 AM. The quantum field from his tether interfered with electronics, another occupational hazard of temporal enforcement.

He found her in their bedroom, surrounded by case files. The victim photos showed the telltale signs of temporal manipulation—bodies caught between moments, cause of death preceding the fatal injury, temporal decay patterns matching Anderson’s signature.

“I’m sorry,” he started, but she cut him off.

“Your tether’s flickering,” she said, nodding at his wrist. The device’s charge indicator pulsed erratically—dangerous levels after the factory containment. “That’s what killed Phillips, isn’t it? Tether failure?”

“Alice—”

“PDU is handling temporal crimes now too,” she continued, holding up a file. “Three victims this week. Temporal displacement causing cellular breakdown. Anderson’s technique, but more refined. He’s teaching someone, isn’t he? That’s why you transferred?”

The tether hummed as another temporal tremor passed through the room. Max whined, sensing the disruption. On Alice’s nightstand, her coffee rippled backward in its cup.

“Anderson found a way to weaponize time itself,” Ethan said. “He could isolate a person’s timeline, manipulate it, create paradox loops that...” He stopped, remembering the Jensen girl’s three simultaneous bodies. “TRU thinks he’s building a network. Teaching others.”

“While PDU handles the bodies they leave behind.” Alice’s detective mask slipped, showing the hurt beneath. “We used to work cases together. Now I’m collecting temporal victims while you chase their killers through time holes.”

Their phones activated simultaneously—his tether vibrating in harmony with the alerts. Different departments, same case. Again.

“Homicide at Central Station,” she read.

“Temporal distortion on Platform Seven,” he said, checking his tether’s declining charge. Three hours of stability left, at best.

Their eyes met in the darkness. The distance between them wasn't measured in miles anymore, but in temporal differential. Each TRU shift pulled him further out of sync, his timeline diverging from hers like light refracting through a prism.

"Be careful," she said, reaching for her badge. "And Ethan? Get that tether checked. I don't want to find your body scattered across three different times."

They left through the same door but headed in different directions, their personal timelines fraying like the victims they both pursued—from opposite ends of time itself.

Episode 4: The Detective's Burden

Alice rubbed her temples, staring at the crime scene photos spread across her desk. The Jenkins murder was high profile enough to attract media attention, but that wasn't what bothered her. Something about the body position, the timeline... Jenkins appeared in three different positions in the same photograph, his form smeared across moments like wet paint.

The timestamp on the morgue report oscillated between 3:47 PM and 4:12 PM—temporal instability bleeding through even into the documentation. Jenkins' watch had been found running backward, but more disturbing was the state of his personal timeline. The medical examiner's report showed cellular degradation consistent with multiple temporal streams occupying the same space—classic Anderson methodology.

"Detective Chen?" Officer Wilson, fresh from the academy, hovered nearby with a notebook. "The witness is ready for questioning. But there's something you should know—she's describing the murder device in detail. Says it's like nothing we've seen before."

Alice's pulse quickened. Anderson's original temporal manipulation technology had never been recovered. TRU's analysis suggested he'd somehow created a device that could isolate and manipulate individual timelines, but they'd only seen the results, never the cause.

The witness in Interview Room Two was a quantum physicist named Dr. Paige Werther, her business suit shifting between states of wear as temporal distortion affected her personal timeline. Her hands shook as she drew something in her notebook—a device that looked like a baroque pocket watch merged with modern quantum technology.

"Where's Detective Reeves? He usually handles these cases." Dr. Werther's eyes darted to the clock, frozen at 2:15 PM. "He was there when Anderson demonstrated the first prototype."

"First prototype?" Alice leaned forward. This was new information.

“The temporal lock picker,” Dr. Werther said, sliding her drawing across the table.

“Anderson called it that—said everyone thinks time is a fixed progression, locked in place. But he found the tumblers, the mechanisms that hold moments together. His device... it doesn’t just manipulate time. It breaks the fundamental lock between cause and effect.”

The drawing showed an intricate mechanism with what appeared to be a quantum core similar to TRU’s tethers but modified in ways that made Alice’s head hurt. Notes in the margin described “temporal tumblers” and “causality bypass circuits.”

“The new version is worse,” Dr. Werther continued, her outline blurring slightly. “The one the killer used on Jenkins... it’s not just picking time’s locks anymore. The locks are failing on their own now. Reality is becoming more temporally unstable, and they’re accelerating it. I saw Jenkins experience death across three different timelines simultaneously. The killer said it was just the beginning.”

Alice’s phone buzzed—Ethan. “Massive temporal cascade building at the Jenkins scene. Anderson’s quantum signature detected but altered. More sophisticated. Werther is in danger. GET HER OUT.”

Dr. Werther flickered, her form becoming transparent. “He said to tell Detective Reeves: ‘The locks are picking themselves now.’ Time’s natural barriers are breaking down. Anderson didn’t just create a key—he weakened the locks themselves. Every use of his device damages the temporal structure further.”

“Officer Wilson! Call TRU—”

But Werther’s timeline was already unraveling. Through the window, Alice saw temporal ripples spreading across the precinct. Her phone displayed Ethan’s next message:

“Anderson’s new device is causing quantum entanglement between victims’ timelines. Werther helped design the prototype. If her timeline collapses—”

The message cut off as localized time distortions intensified. Werther split into three temporal versions—her past, present, and future merging catastrophically. The air crackled with quantum energy as reality buckled around them.

“The locks,” Werther gasped, her voice echoing from three different moments, “they’re not just picked anymore. They’re breaking. Time itself is coming undone. Anderson found the flaw in causality’s code, and now—”

The precinct clocks all stopped at 2:15 PM as Werther’s timeline began to collapse. Alice reached for her sidearm, useless against temporal physics. This was why Ethan had

transferred to TRU—he'd seen this coming. Seeing how Anderson's technology wasn't just manipulating time but damaging the fundamental structure of reality itself.

"Hold on," she told Werther's fragmenting form. "TRU is coming. Detective Reeves—"

But even as she spoke, she wondered if there would be enough time left to save anyone.

Episode 5: Platform Seven

The call came in at 2:47 PM. Multiple witnesses reported seeing the 2:45 to Daybridge arrive twice—once empty, once packed with passengers who dissolved into temporal static. By 3:15, Central Station was in chaos. Train schedules flickered through centuries, and passengers watched their future selves board trains that hadn't existed since 1963.

Alice arrived first, badge already out. The temporal distortion rippled visibly around Platform 7, like heat waves on summer asphalt, but wrong—reality bending into shapes that hurt to look at. Three civilians lay unconscious—or worse—near the platform edge, their bodies cycling through different ages, different possibilities, different deaths.

The station's security footage showed the same moment repeating: the 2:45 train arriving, then the figure—tall, wearing what looked like a Victorian greatcoat modified with quantum technology, face hidden behind a brass mask etched with clockwork patterns. Their movements were wrong, too smooth, as if they were stepping between seconds rather than through them.

She was already setting up a perimeter when she heard the distinctive whine of TRU equipment. Turning, she saw Ethan step out of their response vehicle, wearing his new tactical gear. His quantum tether cast its protective field around him, fighting against the growing temporal distortions.

Their eyes met across the yellow tape. For a moment, neither moved.

Then both of their radios crackled to life, and the moment shattered like temporal glass.

"Massive temporal breach detected," Spooner warned. "Cascade effect spreading through downtown. Power grid's experiencing temporal feedback—we've got reports of lights burning for decades in seconds."

The figure appeared on Platform 7, its greatcoat rippling through different eras—Victorian wool to future-tech fabric and back. The brass mask shifted between designs, sometimes showing a clock face, sometimes displaying quantum equations that wrote themselves in light. In their gloved hand, they held what could only be Anderson's device—a baroque combination of antique clockwork and bleeding-edge quantum technology.

“Detective Reeves,” the figure called, their voice echoing from multiple moments. Each echo revealed a different voice—young, old, male, female — as if their identity shifted with each temporal fluctuation. “And Detective Chen. Together again, for the last time.”

The device in their hand pulsed with sickly purple light. Above the station, the sky began to fragment. Alice could see different times bleeding through—daylight, night, storms from years past and weather that hadn’t happened yet.

“Anderson sends his regards,” the figure continued, their mask settling briefly into a pattern that looked disturbingly like Dr. Werther’s quantum equations. “He said you’d be here. Said you’d have to choose.”

The temporal cascade spread visibly through the city. Office buildings cycled through their construction and demolition in seconds. Streets showed traffic from different decades simultaneously. In the financial district, digital displays sparked as stock prices from the past century tried to display at once.

“The locks aren’t just breaking anymore,” the figure said, raising the device. “Reality itself is coming undone. Time to choose detectives. Save the civilians? Stop the cascade? Or try to catch me—knowing Anderson’s network is already spreading this technology across other cities?”

Multiple versions of the 2:45 train screamed into existence. Ethan’s tether flared warnings as the temporal distortion reached critical levels. Alice saw him glance between her and the figure, then at his quantum stabilizer—barely enough charge to contain the breach or protect the civilians, but not both.

“Alice,” he called over the temporal static, “the civilians—”

“Already on it,” she responded, falling back into their old partnership rhythm. As she rushed to the flickering victims, Ethan activated his stabilizer, creating a containment field around Platform 7.

The figure laughed, the sound echoing from different times. “Poor choice. While you save these few, temporal cascade points are activating across the city. Anderson’s device isn’t just affecting time anymore—it’s breaking the rules that keep reality stable.”

Above them, the sky cracked like glass, showing different eras bleeding together. Downtown, buildings began aging centuries in seconds, then reversing, then splintering across multiple timelines. Traffic signals showed every color simultaneously as chronology itself began to fail.

“You can’t stop it,” the figure said, its form beginning to blur. “The temporal lock picks are spreading. Soon, everyone will have the power to break time’s rules. Chaos isn’t coming, detectives—it’s already here. Has been here. Will always be here.”

The station clocks all struck 2:45 PM again as reality folded in on itself. Through the quantum static, Alice saw Ethan’s containment field failing, saw the figure raising Anderson’s device one final time, saw the city beyond starting to fracture across a thousand different moments.

Time itself began to scream.

Episode 6: Echoes

In the station’s security office, the footage told an impossible story. Train 245 arrived at 2:45 PM. Then again at 2:45 PM. The timestamps were identical, but the passengers were different. In the first iteration, a woman in a blue coat helped her daughter off the train. In the second, her younger self boarded alone. In the third—and there shouldn’t have been a third—both versions merged, their timelines collapsing into quantum uncertainty.

Alice rewound the footage again, studying the brass mask in frame-by-frame detail. Its surface was a masterwork of temporal engineering—nested clockwork gears that shifted and reconfigured themselves, quantum circuitry etched in impossible patterns that seemed to move when viewed directly. The mask’s design incorporated elements she recognized from Dr. Werther’s drawings: temporal tumblers, causality bypass circuits and, most disturbing, a network of fine filaments that could detect and manipulate timeline frequencies.

Dr. Santos’s preliminary report on the platform victims sat unopened on her desk, marked with a red flag. The medical examiner had requested TRU oversight after finding quantum circuitry growing through the victims’ nervous systems—microscopic versions of the mask’s temporal manipulation technology infiltrating organic matter.

Down the hall, Officer Wilson made another furtive call about temporal contraband. Anderson’s network had grown far beyond simple time manipulation devices. They were distributing “temporal lock picks”—quantum tools that could identify and exploit weaknesses in causality itself. Each lock pick contained a miniaturized version of the technology built into the brass mask: probability monitors, timeline separators, and, most crucially, causality destabilizers.

The theory, according to Dr. Werther’s confiscated notes, was elegant in its horror. Reality maintained its linear progression through what she called “temporal anchors”—fixed points that kept different timelines separate and stable. The lock picks detected these

anchors and systematically weakened them, creating gaps in causality that allowed for timeline manipulation. But each use damaged the underlying structure of space-time, like picking a lock so many times the mechanism begins to fail.

In Captain Dixon's office, a familiar pattern pulsed on an ancient pocket watch—the same quantum signature now appearing on every temporal detector in the city. The captain had tried to hide it, but Alice had seen the telltale brass inlay, the clockwork patterns that matched the mask's design.

"Alice," Spooner's voice crackled through quantum interference. "Another cascade building. Financial district. Anderson's network is coordinating these events—we're seeing synchronized temporal attacks across multiple cities now."

Alice stared at the security footage. "The mask's technology—it's spreading, isn't it? Not just through the lock picks, but through the victims themselves."

"It's worse than that. Each lock pick creates a quantum entanglement between the user and the target. The brass mask's wearer isn't just controlling time—they're networking people into a temporal hive mind.

"Everyone exposed to the technology becomes part of Anderson's collective, experiencing multiple timelines simultaneously. The network grows with each new victim."

The lights flickered through the decades. In the break room, coffee aged fifty years in seconds, then reversed to fresh-brewed steam.

"The brass mask coordinates it all," Spooner continued. "It's not just protection—it's a control center. Quantum processors built into the clockwork can monitor and manipulate thousands of fractured timelines simultaneously. And now we're seeing second-generation effects. The technology is evolving, adapting. The temporal lock picks aren't just tools anymore—they're becoming part of reality's infrastructure."

The call cut off as another cascade wave hit. Alice's computer displayed future cases alongside past arrests. Through her window, she watched the sky cycle through different eras, temporal fault lines spreading like cracks in reality's foundation.

Anderson's network was growing exponentially. Each new lock pick, each new victim, each damaged temporal anchor created more opportunities for timeline manipulation. The brass mask's wearer wasn't just breaking time's locks—they were replacing them with their own quantum architecture, building a new framework of causality they could control.

In Alice's bottom drawer, the brass mask she'd confiscated pulsed with familiar patterns, its clockwork surfaces rearranging themselves like a living thing. The quantum circuitry

sang to her, promising access to every timeline, every possibility, every version of herself that had ever existed or would exist.

She understood now why Dr. Werther had helped Anderson design it. The mask didn't just let you manipulate time—it let you become time itself.

And somewhere in the city, Anderson's network was growing stronger, spreading its quantum tendrils through reality's weakening fabric, waiting for the moment when time's last locks would finally break.

Episode 7: The Breaking Point

Alice stared at the temporal readouts covering her desk, each one telling a fragment of an impossible story. Dr. Werther's equations matched the academy's 1963 research files perfectly—too perfectly. The quantum formulas describing Anderson's network weren't just similar to the academy's containment protocols; they were evolved versions of the same mathematics.

"You need to see this," she told Ethan over the quantum-stabilized line. Static crackled as another temporal cascade rippled through downtown. "Anderson didn't create his technology. He stole it—from us. From the academy."

Through her office window, she watched reality fracture along familiar lines. The brass mask's patterns, the quantum circuitry, even the temporal lock picks—all of them derived from experiments conducted in the academy's sealed west wing. They weren't just weapons; they were teaching tools, designed to accelerate temporal awareness in potential recruits.

"The precinct isn't just adapting to temporal phenomena," she continued, watching officers struggle with timeline shifts in the bullpen below. "We're part of it. The academy's been preparing us for this since 1963. Every protocol, every equipment modification, every training program—they're all based on research from the original containment breach."

Her computer displayed footage from multiple timelines simultaneously: officers developing temporal sensitivity through repeated exposure, technical teams evolving to handle quantum violations, civilian observers documenting reality breaks through social media. The pattern was clear, but its implications were terrifying.

"They're not just breaking time," she realized, her voice synchronizing across several moments. "They're breaking us. Changing how we perceive reality. The department's adaptation isn't a response—it's part of their plan."

The temporal support group forming among affected officers, the technical division's quantum evolution, even the civilian observation networks—all of it followed patterns laid out in the academy's original research. Anderson's network wasn't fighting law enforcement; it was transforming it, using the department's own temporal exposure protocols to create new sensitives.

“Get to the precinct,” she told Ethan as her office began to desynchronize from normal time. “Everything's connected—the academy, Anderson, the brass masks. This isn't just about temporal crime anymore. It's about—”

The temporal cascade hit before she could finish, turning her last words into quantum static. Outside, the city skyline flickered through decades as reality's locks began to fail. In the bullpen, officers struggled with equipment designed to handle a crisis that had been planned since before their grandparents joined the force.

Alice's badge pulsed with familiar energy as temporal chaos spread through the department. The precinct wasn't just adapting to a new kind of crime—it was becoming something else entirely. And somewhere in the quantum static, she could hear her sister's voice warning her about the moment everything would change.

The moment had arrived. And the department's transformation was just the beginning.

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About the Author

Rae Stonehouse crafts dark supernatural mysteries where noir meets the paranormal. Drawing on over 40 years in psychology and mental health, he brings emotional depth and psychological complexity to urban fantasy. The Ethan Reeves series explores the shadows lurking in Daybridge—where every case uncovers secrets better left buried.

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Want to Know What Happens Next?

The Locks Are Breaking. Reality Is Evolving. And Alice Chen Sees It All.

You've witnessed the temporal cascade at Platform 7. You've learned about Anderson's network and the brass masks that coordinate quantum chaos across cities. You've discovered that Daybridge Police Academy has been preparing officers for this crisis since 1963—and that the preparation itself might be part of the plan.

But the investigation has barely begun.

Why can Alice perceive multiple timelines when others can't?

What happened in the academy's west wing that created Anderson's technology?

And why is the department's adaptation to temporal phenomena following patterns laid out sixty years ago?

The quantum conspiracy deepens in *Quantum Detective: The Alice Chen Files*

Alice must navigate temporal chaos while Ethan learns to contain cascades that erase entire neighborhoods. The brass mask's wearer isn't just manipulating time—they're networking victims into a temporal hive mind. And the lock picks spreading through Anderson's network aren't just breaking reality's rules—they're replacing them with quantum architecture someone can control.

Some transformations can't be reversed. Some timelines can't be restored. And when reality's last locks finally break, the entire city will experience what Alice already knows: time isn't what we thought it was.

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