

The Quantum Mechanics (treatment)

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Logline: When world leaders learn that an impending disaster will wipe out life on Earth, they send a team back in time to China to accelerate innovation in the past, so that the present will have the advanced technology needed for humanity to survive.

Prologue:

Beijing, 1426.

Guards lead a powerfully built man into a courtyard. The MINISTER OF PUNISHMENT addresses the prisoner as ZHU GAOXU (46), a commoner formerly known as the Prince of Han, and informs him that he's been sentenced to die for treason and rebellion against the Emperor, his uncle.

As NOBLE CONSORT XIA GONG ZHANG (26) watches with pleasure from behind a screen, the guards force Zhu Gaoxu to his knees. More guards carry in a huge bronze vessel and place it over him. Servants bring in charcoal and heap it around the vessel. The Minister of Punishment lights the charcoal with a torch.

But with a mighty effort the Prince lifts up the vessel as the Minister screams for more guards.

Act One:

Beijing, 2020.

In a reception hall, 20 world leaders greet each other and pose for pictures.

But inside a private meeting room the mood turns somber.

The CHINESE PREMIER indicates a giant wall screen. The WN10 brown dwarf exo-star is scheduled to strike Earth in six months. Unless one of the proposed solutions works, this will be their last meeting.

The FRENCH PRESIDENT comments that if only they'd had more of a "running start" the nations of Earth might have been able to do something – at least put human colonies on other worlds before life on Earth is destroyed.

The AMERICAN PRESIDENT announces that American scientists may have developed just such a "running start."

She introduces DR. ELI WILENSKY (30s/40s) of MIT. He believes he can send humans back in time. Their job will be to "fix" the past -- they'll be "Quantum Mechanics."

Changing the past will create alternate futures. They hope that in at least one of them humanity will survive.

The Chinese Premiere introduces PROF. YANG CHU NI (30s/40s). She says that historians have identified several key points in history where they might be able to make a difference.

One of the key points is in Ming Dynasty China, when the Emperor suddenly cancelled the voyages of Admiral Zheng He that were spreading advanced Chinese technology as far as Africa and the Middle East.

Some of the leaders are skeptical. A huge argument breaks out.

Days later, the "Ming Team" assembles at Peking University. Eli explains how his time travel equipment needs to be set up in an area that was open space on the date in question.

Chu Ni takes Eli on a walk through Jingshan Park, while Eli takes GPS readings of possible sites. He admits that he doesn't know much about Chinese science at the time of the Ming Dynasty. Chu Ni takes Eli to the China Science & Technology Museum and shows him the exhibits on ancient Chinese technology, including astronomy, the compass, gunpowder, multi-stage rocketry, metallurgy, and printing. She shows him a model of one of the 500-foot-long treasure ships of Admiral Zheng He.

Eli notices two scary guys in the museum that he also saw in the park. The two scary guys drag Eli and Chu Ni into a storage room. The men first try to bribe them to go back to another period in history, then threaten them. Eli and Chu Ni refuse and try to leave. When the scary guys try to stop them, Chu Ni attacks them, using impressive martial arts skills, and leaves them unconscious.

Eli's impressed. Chu Ni explains that her skills as a historian aren't the only reason she was picked for this mission.

Back at the University, Chu Ni tells Eli that 1424 should be the year they target – the last year of the reign of Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor, who sent Zheng He out in the first treasure fleet expeditions. His eldest son and heir stopped the voyages when he became Emperor. They need to convince the Emperor to name his *second* son as his heir – Zhu Gaoxu, the Prince of Han. He was a great warrior and his father's favorite. But he defied his father's orders and was exiled to Shandong, where he lived as a farmer while secretly training an army.

Eli and Chu Ni are outfitted to suit their cover personas. They also get some cool gadgets:

- a ceremonial dagger that conceals a laser weapon;

- computers that look like leather-bound books;
- communications devices concealed inside earrings;
- a bio-array scanner that looks like a pen;
- precious jewels with transmitters embedded in the settings.

Finally, they're ready. They bring the time travel device out to Jingshan Park under police escort.

Eli activates the device. He and Chu Ni (and the device) vanish from sight.

Act 2:

Eli and Chu Ni (and the device) arrive in the past.

They go to the palace and Chi Ni asks to see the Chief Eunuch. She explains that Eli is an ambassador from King Henry of England who wants to arrange an audience with the Emperor.

They're presented to EMPEROR ZHU DI (64), who looks unwell. Eli (with Chu Ni interpreting) says that he wishes to enter into trade negotiations. He's heard of the great Admiral Zheng He and wants him to sail to England with goods to trade.

The Emperor's son and heir, the fat and phlegmatic CROWN PRINCE ZHU GAOCHI (46), cautions against wasting any more tax revenues on expensive adventures. The Emperor berates him for having the soul of a tax collector, and has the admiral summoned.

ADMIRAL ZHENG HE (54) arrives in the audience chamber – he's almost seven feet tall, with a waist five feet around, glaring eyes, and a booming voice. The Emperor explains about the proposed trip to England and Eli presents a parchment map annotated in Chinese.

The Emperor feels sick and the royal physicians are summoned. Chu Ni seizes the opportunity and tells the Emperor that Eli is also a great doctor.

The royal physicians and guards, of course, are not letting Eli anywhere near the Emperor. So Chu Ni asks if they can have just a single drop of saliva from the Emperor's mouth. The Emperor spits into his silk handkerchief and hands it to her. Eli tests it with the bio-array while the physicians administer an elixir to the Emperor.

The bio-array sends its data to the computer "book." Eli tells Chu Ni that the Emperor has high levels of arsenic and lead in his system.

Chu Ni asks for a sample of the elixir and Eli tests it. It also has high levels of arsenic and lead. Chu Ni tells the Emperor that the medicine is making him sicker. The Emperor looks impressed as Eli ticks off his symptoms.

Eli suggests a course of treatment – starting with stopping the elixirs. The Emperor dismisses the physicians and now looks with favor on Eli and Chu Ni and says that they'll be his guests.

In the guest quarters, Eli's encouraged that they've gotten the Emperor's confidence so quickly. But Chu Ni says it's not so simple – the palace bureaucracy and politics are incredibly complicated, and they've already made enemies of the royal physicians.

She checks her computer "book," which shows conversations from people she gave the bugged jewels to. Everyone in the palace is talking about them, and the talk isn't friendly.

A banquet invitation comes from the Concubine Xia Gong Zhang. Chu Ni sends Concubine Xia one of the bugged jewels in thanks for the invitation.

At the banquet, they meet Concubine Xia (the woman behind the screen in the prologue). The Emperor, his son the Crown Prince, Admiral Zheng He, and the Crown Prince's son ZHU ZHANJI (27) are also guests.

Zhu Zhanji is a pleasant man who shows them his paintings. He's clearly under the thumb of Concubine Xia.

As the guests drink the discussion gets heated. Again, the Crown Prince criticizes the planned voyage to England.

The Emperor tells him he's an idiot and has water in his veins. The Prince of Han is a real man – a warrior, not a bureaucrat or (he sneers at his grandson) a painter. The Prince of Han should be the heir. He's been in exile long enough – he's learned his lesson by now. The Emperor will send the order to recall him in the morning.

Concubine Xia looks very alarmed at this.

After the banquet, Chu Ni hears excited talk from the bugged jewelry -- the Emperor is dead, and so is the Crown Prince! History has changed -- the Emperor's supposed to fall in battle against the Mongols, and his heir should survive him for a year.

Chu Ni discovers that Concubine Xia has used the opportunity to murder the Emperor and his heir and blame it on the foreign sorcerer -- Eli.

Guards are on their way to arrest Eli and Chu Ni. They'll be put to death by torture.

Chu Ni leads Eli toward Admiral Zheng He's quarters. He has his own private guards and helps them fight their way out of the palace. Chu Ni also uses her martial arts skills, and Eli uses their high tech weapons.

Eli says they have to get back to where they left the time travel device, so that they can go back to an earlier point in history and convince the Emperor to make the Prince of Han his heir before he's murdered.

But when they get to the park, the device is gone. They're trapped in the past -- and they still need to save the future.

Eli and Chu Ni tell Admiral Zheng they're from the future. Chu Ni tells him that the new Emperor will allow only one more voyage -- before his wife, Concubine-turned-Empress Xia, has him murdered so that she can serve as Empress-Regent for her young son.

The Admiral agrees to help them get to the Prince of Han -- even though he's 1,600 kilometers away in Le'an.

They make the long journey by road and river and along the coast. Chu Ni shows Eli the beauties of China and they grow closer.

Finally, they reach the exiled Prince of Han. He's mellowed during his exile, and at first he's reluctant to rebel against his nephew, the new Emperor. But when Eli and Chu Ni tell him what will happen to China -- and the planet -- if he doesn't -- he agrees.

Rather than waiting for the new Emperor to come to him, the Prince musters his private army and they set out toward Beijing. Chu Ni and Eli discuss with the Prince and Admiral how to use both existing Chinese technology and their modern gadgets to overcome the Emperor's superior forces -- 20,000 men to their 5,000.

They build multi-stage rockets and bombs, and plan to use hot air balloons to watch the enemy's movements and bombard the enemy troops from above.

The two armies meet in battle. Eli goes up in one of the balloons and relays information to Chu Ni using their communications devices. She translates it for the Prince and Admiral, who use it to direct their troops.

Eli also drops bombs on the Emperor's troops -- and sees that Concubine Xia is traveling with the army.

The new Emperor is overwhelmed by the battle and retreats to his tent. Concubine Xia takes over. She spots Eli's balloon and orders him shot down with fire arrows.

It looks like the battle is lost and the mission has failed.

Act 3:

Eli survives the crash. With the help of his gadgets, he makes his way through the fighting back to Chu Ni.

But Concubine Xia rides after him, and she tries to kill the Prince of Han.

Chu Ni fights her and saves the Prince. She's reunited with Eli.

Finally, the Prince and Admiral are victorious. The new Emperor is happy to abdicate. He never really wanted to be Emperor -- that was Concubine Xia's idea. He'd rather spend his days painting.

In a ceremony, Eli and Chu Ni are honored for their services to the new Emperor. The Admiral invites them to come along on his voyages -- when he gets to England he'll need an interpreter.

Eli and Chu Ni wonder if it will be enough -- will they save humanity? Trapped in the past, they'll never know...

Epilogue

Beijing, 2020.

Archeologists digging outside the city discover a Ming Dynasty double tomb for a married couple. They're shocked that one of the inscriptions is in English as well as Chinese, and even more shocked that Dr. Eli Wilensky has a birthdate in the 20th century and a date of death in the late 15th century.

Then the team members get into their flying cars and head back to Beijing -- which is far more futuristic than in its original 2018 version.

As the archeologists display their finds on a news show, we rise above the Earth to show the news being watched on space stations, in domed Moon cities, on Mars (in the process of being terraformed), and on a floating base on the ice sea of Titan.

Along the way we pass the WN10 dwarf star -- heading out of the solar system surrounded by a ring of orbiting thrusters that keep it pointed away from human habitations.

And leaving the solar system, we catch up with a generation ship heading to planets that circle the distant stars.

The ship is called the ADMIRAL ZHENG HE.

FADE OUT.