

The Curious Patents of John Quincy St. Clair

A Short Story by Steve Rummins

Monday, September 8th 2003 - Roger Brent awoke five minutes before his alarm, as he did every morning. The same faint warmth fluttered behind his ribs—the echo of a dream that felt important, though it dissolved the moment he blinked. There was a face in it, he was sure. A woman's. Her name danced on the tip of his tongue and then dropped off like ash in a breeze.

He sat up and rubbed the bridge of his nose. *Just another dream*, he told himself. *Too much iced tea before bed.*

The bathroom mirror greeted him with the same lopsided comb-over, coaxed carefully across the top of his head. He adjusted it with practiced precision, a technique he'd perfected over years of trial, error, and a brief, ill-advised attempt at Rogaine. The chemical burn had lasted two weeks. The memory of it still itched.

His mustache, however, was flawless—trimmed just enough to suggest intellectual heft. It gave him the air of a man with insights. People trusted mustaches. Albert Einstein had one.

After his shower, he microwaved two frozen sausage biscuits and sat down at the small kitchen table with a mug of instant coffee. The news anchor on his off-brand flat screen droned on about the “latest left-wing madness in the universities.” Roger nodded in agreement, muttering into his cup.

“The whole country's gone soft...”

He glanced at the clock—7:24. Time to go.

Roger's ID badge bounced gently against his chest as he stepped onto the city bus. Seat cushions cracked beneath him like old vinyl. He sat in his usual spot—third row back, window seat, across from the fire extinguisher.

He didn't drive. Not anymore. He tried to remember why once, but the memory pulled away from him like a fish slipping the line.

Probably that thing with the shoulder, he thought vaguely. Or maybe the meds after...

His eyes drifted to the world beyond the glass as the bus rumbled forward. Somewhere behind the haze of morning light and static thoughts, the face from his dream tried to return.

It didn't.

He arrived at the Federal Patent Office Building—a boxy gray mass that looked like someone had stacked cinderblocks around a DMV. The air smelled like copier ink and old upholstery. The security guard waved him in without looking up.

Roger liked the quiet there. It was sacred. Ancient. The corridors hummed like they were lined with secrets. Einstein once worked at a patent office. That mattered.

When he reached his office—a tidy square of government beige—he paused. Someone was already inside.

A man in full military dress sat in Roger's chair, legs crossed casually, clicking through messages on a BlackBerry. Aviators perched on his forehead. A thick manila binder rested in his lap.

"Roger Brent," the man said without looking up.

Roger blinked. "General Ellison?"

The man smiled faintly, still not making eye contact. "You do remember."

"I mean, I know of you, sir. I served under your group in Desert Storm. I don't think we ever actually spoke, though."

Now the general looked up, locking eyes with Roger for a long moment. A slow, knowing grin crept across his face.

"Still having trouble with the memory, huh?"

Roger didn't reply, but something deep inside him stirred. *Side effect of the anthrax vaccine*, he thought reflexively. Though lately, he wasn't sure that was the whole story.

General Ellison stood and handed Roger the binder. "These need to be filed. Military-developed tech. It's become prudent that we get these patented before the Chinese start copying them. If that happens, we need to be able to say we had them first."

Roger accepted the binder slowly. "All right, and... the name?"

"John Quincy St. Clair," Ellison said. "Navy picked it. Something about a founding father and a battleship. Doesn't matter."

Roger flipped through the first few pages, brow furrowing. Diagrams, formulas, jargon he didn't even recognize. They didn't look like anything a normal person would dream up—let alone build.

"I don't know anything about technology like this."

Ellison clapped him once on the shoulder. "That's why you're the man for the job, Roger."

And just like that, the general turned and walked out, already texting someone on his way down the hall. A bit down the corridor, Ellison put his phone down, turned back, and said, "Oh—and your supervisor knows that filing these patents is your number one priority, Roger."

He shot a smirking grin, then went right back to texting as he walked away.

Roger stood alone in the beige office, holding the binder like it had just begun to hum.

Almost no sooner had Roger actually sat down than his supervisor appeared in the doorway, arms full of manila folders and an expression like she'd bitten into something sour.

"I don't know who that guy thinks he is," she said, without preamble. "But I just got a call from my boss, and now I have to reassign your entire caseload."

She dropped the folders onto the adjacent desk with a loud *thwack*.

“The other clerks are going to love this,” she muttered. “They’re already asking questions, and I’m not even allowed to ask what these new patents are about. And honestly? I don’t want to know.”

Roger opened his mouth, but she cut him off.

“I didn’t think your military background made you qualified for this job, to be perfectly honest. But somebody up top wanted you here.”

She yanked the stack of patent cases off his desk—his old workload—and gave him one last scowl before turning on her heel.

“I’ve got enough to deal with today without you becoming a walking mystery file.”

And with that, she huffed out of the room, leaving Roger alone with the strange binder and a silence that felt suddenly heavier than before.

He sat down, still staring at the binder as if it might open on its own. The patents inside read like the table of contents from a science fiction novel—hyperspace energy generators, triangular spacecrafts, remote viewing amplifiers. Each title seemed more unhinged than the last.

He flipped through them slowly, one by one, trying to decide where to even begin. Most of the documents were so dense with equations and terminology he didn’t recognize that his eyes glazed over just trying to parse the first sentence.

Finally, he stopped at one that felt... almost normal by comparison.

Internet Cellular Phone Prepaid Service.

“Okay,” he muttered. “That one at least makes sense.”

He marked the patent for processing first—something to ground himself while he figured out how to even *begin* to file the others.

Still, something gnawed at him. The general had been deadly serious. These weren’t jokes. They weren’t pranks. Someone, somewhere, believed this was real. And now it was *his* job to make it official.

That night, as the office emptied and the hum of fluorescent lights dulled to a background buzz, Roger slipped a few of the stranger patent applications into his briefcase. Just for review, he told himself.

He paused, fingers resting on the edge of the folder. This wasn't protocol. He wasn't even sure if it was legal. Patent files—especially military ones—weren't supposed to leave the building, at least not without a chain of custody and clearance forms. There was a policy about that. He'd read it.

But no one had said he couldn't. The general had dropped them off like a pizza order, no briefing, no handler, just "get them filed." His supervisor didn't want to know. Maybe they were testing him. Or maybe they wanted him to fail.

He stared down at the top page: Cavitating Oil Hyperspace Energy Generator.

It looked like a prank. Or bait. And yet... it gnawed at him.

Curiosity, he told himself. That was all. Just a need to make sense of the day—of everything.

He glanced toward the hallway, then closed the briefcase slowly, quietly, like he was hiding something from someone who might walk in and ask the wrong question.

As he walked to the elevator, the weight of the briefcase pulled oddly at his shoulder—like it contained something heavier than paper. At home, he laid them out on his kitchen table beneath the yellowed overhead light. One was titled **"Walking Through Walls Training System."**

Roger let out a sharp laugh.

"Sure," he said to the empty room. "Why not?"

But even as he joked, he kept reading.

The diagrams in the patent—vortex fields, toroidal spin alignments, something called "bioresonance phasing"—they all felt oddly familiar, like echoes of a dream he couldn't quite remember. He skimmed further. Magnetic coils. Rotating gyros. Consciousness entrainment.

It was nonsense. It *had* to be. Yet...

He sat back in his chair and stared at the page. The phrase "non-local consciousness coupling" practically buzzed off the paper.

He knew this couldn't be real science, but the more he read, the more a quiet unease took root. Not because it was absurd, but because it was starting to feel like he'd read it before—somewhere far deeper than paper and ink.

Over the next few nights, Roger began tinkering. He started small—sketching circuit diagrams, ordering cheap magnets, winding coils in his cramped apartment. He laughed at himself for taking it seriously, but each time he adjusted the setup, a new detail would flicker back into his mind.

You tried this before, something whispered. *You just don't remember.*

By the end of the week, a corner of his apartment resembled a cross between a physics lab and a middle school science fair. He had no real idea what he was doing, but some instinct—buried deep—guided his hands.

On a rainy Thursday night, he cleared a path between his makeshift rig and the far wall. He activated the spinning coils, then stood across the room.

"Well," he muttered. "Here we go"

He took a breath, braced himself, and charged headfirst into the wall.

Thud.

He lay there for a minute before laughing. Not a bitter laugh—something more... bewildered. His ribs ached, and his pride even more so. But as he lay sprawled on the carpet, staring up at the buzzing light fixture, something flickered loose in his mind.

Not just a memory—an idea. A technical detail from the patent. Something about vortex diameter and harmonic field stabilization. The kind of phrase that shouldn't have meant anything to him... and yet, it clicked.

"Too small," he muttered. "The field's too small."

He was going to need a bigger coil. Stronger magnetic coupling. Maybe even a dampening array. The diagram flashed through his mind like he'd seen it on a chalkboard a lifetime ago.

A day passed. He barely slept. He spent the morning rewiring the setup, wrapping copper wire around a plastic laundry basket to increase the radius. The thing looked more like a prop from a high school play than a scientific device, but it hummed differently now—deeper, more resonant.

For safety, he wore a plastic bucket on his head. Whether it was to protect himself or just to take the edge off the absurdity, even he wasn't sure.

He took a breath. Reset the coils. The machine buzzed low, vibrating through the floor like distant thunder. The air around it seemed thicker—charged. Something was different this time. He could feel it. He stood again at the opposite end of the room.

“Here goes nothing.”

He sprinted forward, vision dark inside the bucket.

Just as he neared the wall, a name exploded into his mind:

Andreak.

He stopped mid-stride, ripping the bucket off his head.

He was no longer in the room.

He turned, heart pounding. He was standing in the hallway outside his apartment.

A long silence stretched before he whispered, “Wow...”

Then it hit him.

The name. The memories. A flood of images, voices, equations—his life, *his real life*, coming back in a crashing wave. The years as Roger Brent, the patent clerk,

fell away like an old costume. He remembered the experiments. The failures. The things they made him forget.

He wasn't just filing these patents. He had written them.

He returned to the apartment—now somehow foreign and temporary. The furniture looked smaller. The walls felt closer. It was like waking up from a dream inside someone else's life.

He didn't waste time. The hesitation was gone. He moved with a precision that surprised even him, assembling components he barely remembered ordering, tweaking magnetic polarities, reinforcing the vortex channel with every wire he had. He reviewed the patent with a different lens now—not as a skeptic, but as its author.

The Walking Through Walls Training System hadn't been a novelty. It wasn't about phasing through drywall. It was a containment field. A transit array. A doorway into a higher state of matter—a tunneling path between dimensions. Not metaphorically. Literally.

And it had always been about getting home.

He activated the system. The coils throbbed with a low, chest-deep frequency. The lights flickered and dimmed. The air grew dense, full of static and warmth, like standing at the edge of a summer thunderstorm.

Then it opened.

The portal wasn't dramatic. No lightning. No sound. Just a shimmer, like heat rising from pavement—but within it, space bent gently outward into a soft, vertical ripple, glowing faint blue around the edges. Inside it, another room appeared.

A lab. Clean. Sleek. Walls paneled in brushed aluminum. Beakers and instruments on glass tables. And people—two, three of them—staring at the glowing aperture in stunned silence.

One of them was Andreah.

Her hair was longer than he remembered. She wore a white lab coat over a green turtleneck, and when she turned toward him, her eyes went wide. Her lips parted in shock. Then, instinctively, she shouted something over her shoulder, gesturing toward the others. A young technician dropped a clipboard.

Then she looked back.

She saw *him*.

"Roger?" she whispered.

Her hand reached out slowly toward the ripple of the doorway, fingertips trembling.

He stepped forward, eyes locked with hers.

He didn't hesitate.

No one at the patent office ever heard from Roger Brent again.

His supervisor, already overworked and chronically under-caffeinated, assumed he'd just flaked out and never returned. There was no forwarding address. No resignation notice. His case files had already been reassigned. A quiet memo went around asking if anyone had seen him. No one had.

Weeks passed.

Then, one day, a completed patent application appeared in the system—formatted perfectly. Diagrams annotated, legal language pristine, supporting documents filed with surgical precision.

The name on the application? **John Quincy St. Clair.**

They filed it without question.

And then it happened again.

Every few months, a new invention would quietly enter the system. Always from nowhere. Always flawless. Always under the same name.

Some say the military had an underground research branch operating out of the Patent Office. Others claim Roger Brent never existed to begin with—that he was a placeholder, a ghost employee buried in government records. And then there are the fringe types who talk about time travel, memory suppression, and extradimensional transit systems built on suppressed patents.

Most people roll their eyes.

But every once in a while—on a slow day in the archives—some clerk will stumble across the St. Clair file, blow the dust off the top, and wonder why or how these patents came to be.