



Five Steps Ahead

Overcoming All Obstacles

By Rich Wingerter



Concept

A time travel story guided by love

What if a man could go back to correct an egregious injustice from his childhood? What if that meant giving up the love of his life?

- **Five Steps Ahead** has a strong concept:

- **Strong hook.** Early on, the audience experiences Robert and Hal traveling in time, testing out Robert's craft. They also see the danger as Robert tests the field with his wooden ruler and remarks that if the field doesn't line up correctly, there could be a colossal explosion.
- **Strong indicator.** Audiences know there's an inherent danger in Robert connecting with a woman he loves when she has a husband and kids. This can't go well in one way or another.
- **Large audience.** While it has elements that appeal to several different specific audiences (science fiction, classical music, etc.), there's nothing in this story that would prevent it from appealing to the general public. It doesn't have weird space aliens.
- **Big story.** Robert is trying to accomplish something enormous. He's trying to travel in time to save someone's life. He has to overcome several obstacles, both interpersonal and practical, to achieve his goal.
- **Resonates with all audiences.** It's easy to understand what the protagonist is trying to accomplish and why it is difficult.

Five Steps Ahead gives audiences an experience they can't get in their own lives: Traveling in time, holding someone unavailable to them that they genuinely love, and protecting them from a tragedy that's already occurred.

Inspirations

- This story was inspired by the question, "What if you had a crush on someone so strong you created a time machine to be with that person?"
- Many years ago, I worked in the music library for my college. The music librarian took pity on me because I liked hard rock. She tried to improve my musical tastes. She *suggested* I listen to classics that she thought might appeal to me, like *Also sprach Zarathustra* (because, *hard rock*).
- As I worked, music students filtered through the library to get albums and sheet music. I met and befriended some. I took note of their personalities and lives.
- **Five Steps Ahead** is a tribute to those music students. And that music librarian.

Story Structure

Five Steps Ahead is based on eight major sequences. It draws on elements from several genres and sub-genres:

- As a time-travel story it is a science fiction story.
- As a love story it is a tragic romance.
- As a buddy story it is a road trip in time.
- It has multiple strong characters in complex relationships.

The central character, Robert, like many of the most brilliant inventors, is single-minded in pursuit of his goal. This is his greatest asset and his greatest liability.

The Story

1

Opening Sequence

Robert tells his friend, Hal, that he doesn't plan to return to teach in the fall at their university in North Carolina. He then takes Hal on a short time trip from 2009 to 1979, the time of his childhood. He reveals he wants to see his childhood piano teacher, Carolyn, back where he grew up in Indiana.

Hal peers through the gloom.

His gaze falls on THE TIME MACHINE.

It is a plastic, egg-shaped structure, the size of a large camper. It seems to float just above the ground.

White on the outside, but with darkly tinted windows at the front end, like the windshield on a futuristic car, and solar panels on the roof.

On the near side Hal sees the faint outline of a door.



The Story

Landing Sequence

Robert and Hal go to Indiana and travel back to 1979. Robert tries to set up near Carolyn's place at Dorothy's house, but Dorothy's relative, Marge, disrupts that plan.

Model for Dorothy's house in Morseville, IN, where Robert grew up.



The Story

3

Meet Cute Sequence

Robert and Hal meet Carolyn at a piano recital. Later, Robert “battles” with her on the pianos in her home music studio. They meet her husband, Matthew, and her kids (Freddy and Base).

Model for concert hall for piano recital where Robert and Hal catch up with Carolyn.



The Story

4

Real Plan Revealed Sequence...1

Robert begins to confront the reality of Carolyn and her family. Hal finds a job on a farm. Robert watches baseball on TV with Matthew and kids...where they get a surprise.

Carolyn worries Matthew will die as he travels for work. Robert reassures her he'll be fine.

Robert, Matthew, and the kids watch on TV as the Chicago White Sox host the Detroit Tigers, July 12, 1979.

Between games of a two-night double-header, Disco Demolition Night disrupts baseball, leading to some uncomfortable questions about the future.



The Story

Real Plan Revealed
Sequence...2

Robert and Hal watch Carolyn with kids at the playground, and Robert shares a romantic moment with her before being rudely interrupted by Hal.

Robert and Carolyn walk the
labyrinth at the kid park...
and nearly kiss.



The Story

Real Plan Revealed
Sequence...3

Hal goes to Chicago in 2009 to get future medicine for Dorothy. He stops to research the past. That reveals Carolyn's husband dies in a swimming accident in 1979. Hal thinks Robert is a cad.

After Hal returns to 1979, bandits commandeer the time machine. But Robert dumps them in the future.



The Story

Real Plan Revealed
Sequence...4

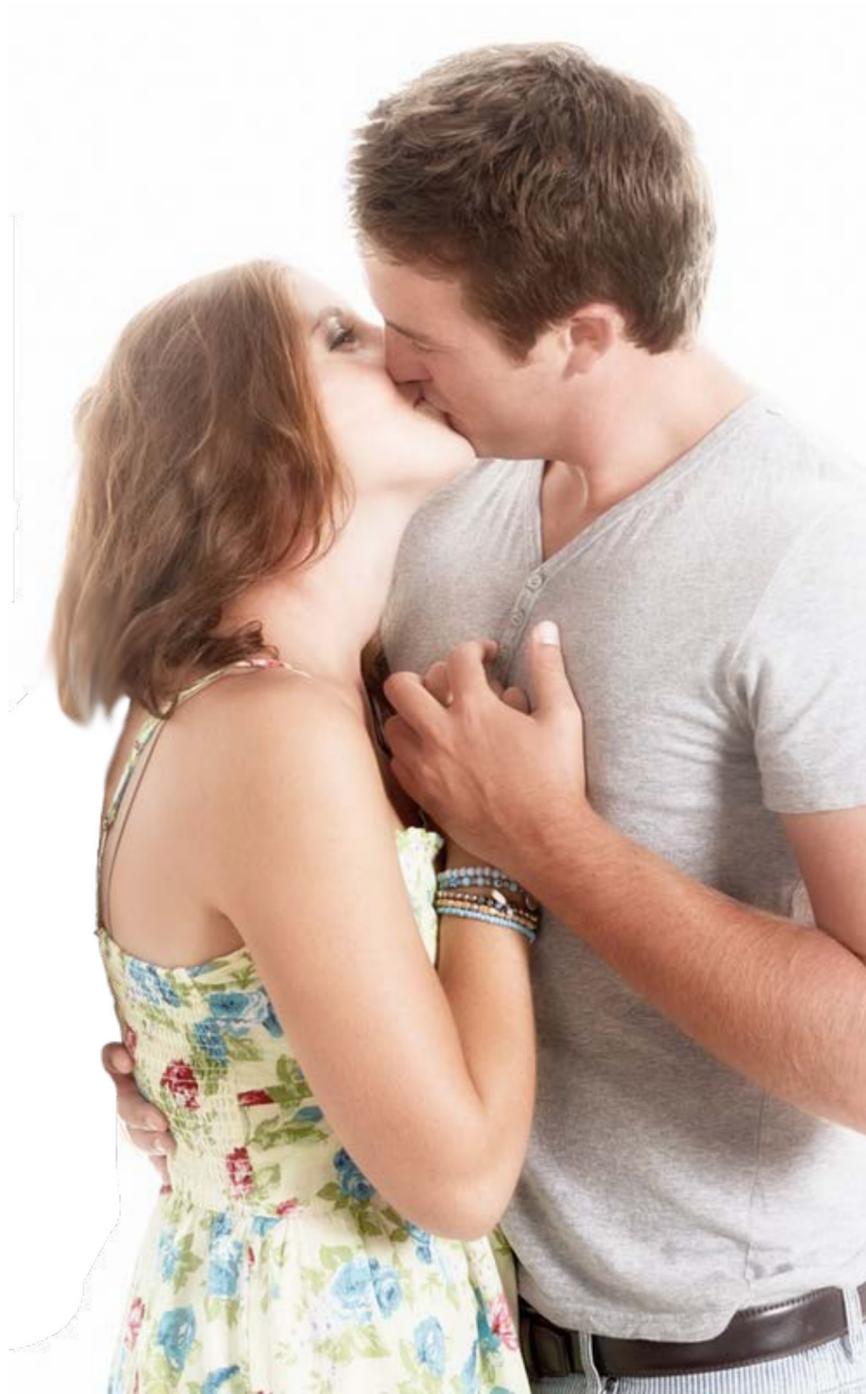
Robert reveals he wants Hal to save Matthew, completely upsetting Hal's image of Robert.

Robert and Hal go to the lake, but Robert, himself, has to save Matthew when Hal is out of position.



The Story

Robert's Choice Sequence



Robert has to decide whether to return to 2009, having accomplished the rescue, even though now he's in love with Carolyn.

Robert and Hal plan to leave in a few days. But Carolyn gives Robert a romantic kiss that forces him to confront his real feelings for her.

When farm equipment breaks, Hal finishes work early. He goes back to Carolyn's place, where he secretly observes Robert and Carolyn stretched out on her bed reading music.

The Story

8

Hal's Confrontation Sequence

Hal is furious and accuses Robert of going back on his word to leave. Robert claims he just needs time to decide what to do. But Hal scolds him about his perceived relationship with Carolyn. He picks up a newspaper and pretends to read.

Robert, to the newspaper, acknowledges he's less than perfect. Hal calms, but tells Robert he wants to return home.

"I'm sure there are men of sterling character. A bright light shines down from heaven and a voice whispers.

"They push aside temptations. Those men can see riches for the taking, but they'd have to compromise their principles, and they turn away. Those men can watch Helen leave and say, 'Let Paris have her'.

"I'm sure they are content with their lot, in this life or the next. They aren't born wanting what can't be.

"But I dream of things and ask 'Why not?' Does that make me the serpent? Am I evil for violating the laws of time?"



The Story

9

Battle of Friends Sequence

Their argument intensifies on the side of the highway. Hal accuses Robert of having sex with Carolyn, which infuriates him. Robert stomps into the highway and is hit by a semi. Carolyn sees this from the front of her house and runs over, but Robert is dead. Hal sees the effect of Robert's death on Carolyn.

Robert and Hal continue their argument on the side of the highway as rain starts to fall.

The car sits in a cutoff dangerously close to the highway, as a semi truck looms.



The Story

10

Ultimate Consequences

Hal learns from Carolyn that she never had sex with Robert. Marge prompts Hal to prevent Robert's death using the time machine, but to do that they will have to go to Robert's study in 2009 and use his lab books to learn how to operate it. Hal reveals the time machine to Marge.

(And then there's a sequel.)

INT. BASE CAMP BARN (1979) - DAY

The small door to the barn opens and Hal steps through, followed by Marge.

Her eyes open wide on...

THE TIME MACHINE

It sinks in for Marge; they're really going.

HAL (O.S.)

This, my friend, is a time machine.



Robert

Robert (42), tall and athletic, moves with great self-assurance. Smarter than nearly everyone and knows it.



Carolyn

Carolyn (35), slender with red hair, dresses smartly, partial to sun dresses and pretty jewelry.



Financial

Budgeting

- Ideally, **Five Steps Ahead** would be shot for about \$15-20 million dollars.
- Recent film budgets
 - **Companion (2025, science fiction): \$10 million.** A weekend getaway with friends at a remote cabin turns into chaos after it's revealed that one of the guests is not what they seem.
 - **Good Fortune (2025, comedy drama fantasy): \$30 million.** A well-meaning but rather inept angel named Gabriel meddles in the lives of a struggling gig worker and a wealthy venture capitalist. Note, the box office so far is \$26 million.
 - **Regretting You (2025, romantic drama): \$30 million.** A mother and daughter must grapple with what's left after a devastating accident reveals a shocking betrayal and forces them to confront family secrets, redefine love, and rediscover themselves. Note, this film returned \$90.5 million so far, but was judged a B film by viewers. However, "According to the Hollywood Reporter, this was Paramount's only film of 2025 to turn a profit at the box office."

Science Fiction Genre

Recent Science Fiction

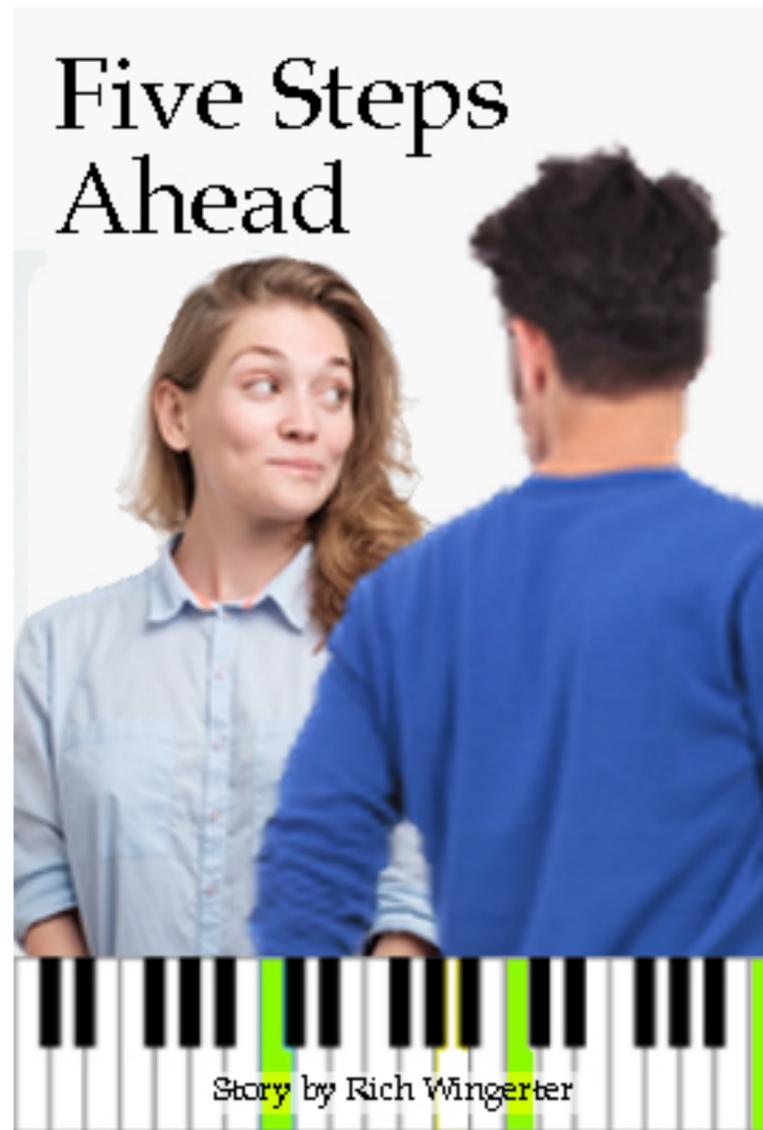
- Other recent science fiction films with unknown budgets:
 - **Love Me (2024, future romance)**: A post-apocalyptic romance in which a buoy and a satellite meet online and fall in love after the end of human civilization. Mean rating on IMDBPro: 5.9 out of 10.
 - **Tim Travers and the Time Traveler's Paradox (2024, time travel)**: What happens if you travel back in time and eliminate your younger self? Terminally bored mad genius Tim Travers seeks the answer and to unravel the time traveler's paradox. The Result? A crazy comedic adventure beyond comprehension. Mean rating on IMDBPro: 5.4 out of 10.
 - **Long Distance (2024, space adventure)**: Follows an asteroid miner who, after crash-landing on an alien planet, must make his way across the harsh terrain, running out of oxygen, hunted by strange creatures, to the only other survivor. Mean rating on IMDBPro: 5.8 out of 10.

Markets

Five Steps Ahead is suitable for the general market for dramatic films. However, it fits multiple genres, and can be marketed to those specific markets.

- **Science Fiction Market:** Science fiction is a popular genre. 2025 works included *Avatar*, *Begonia*, *Companion*, *The Fantastic Four*, not to mention TV shows like *The Foundation*. The film *Tim Travers and the Time Traveler's Paradox*, from 2024, won several awards.
- **Classical Music Market:** According to Emily E. Hogstad in *30 Best Classical Music Movies*, “We’re coming up on a hundred years of films about classical music and classical musicians, and as *Chevalier* [2022] and *Tár* [2022] demonstrate, it seems likely that directors, screenwriters, and actors will continue to be inspired by the world of classical music in the years to come!” Other movies featuring classical music: *Florence Foster Jenkins* (2016), *Grand Piano* (2013), and *A Late Quartet* (2012).
- **Romance Market:** It’s no secret romance is popular, and it is frequently mixed in with other genres. There were over a dozen romance films released in 2025, including *Black Bag*, *Preparation for the Next Life*, and *Eternity*.

Screenplays Available



Five Steps Ahead

Feature Length

Drama · Romance · Science Fiction

A physics professor drags his colleague back in time to help a woman who gave him piano lessons as a child and shares his love of classical music.

Interests

Baseball, Buddy, Character Driven, Health/Medical, Love Story, Music, Quest, Road Trip, Romantic, Senior Issues, Time Travel, Tragedy

Scripts Available



21st Century Love

Feature Length
Romance · Science Fiction

A sentient AI program must protect a fellow AI—and the love of her life—from an evil human at a spy agency intent on shutting him down.

Interests

AGI, Erotic Theme, Espionage, Futuristic, Love Story, Mystery, Romantic, Romantic Comedy, Spy, Virtual Reality

Screenplays Available



The Elf Thief

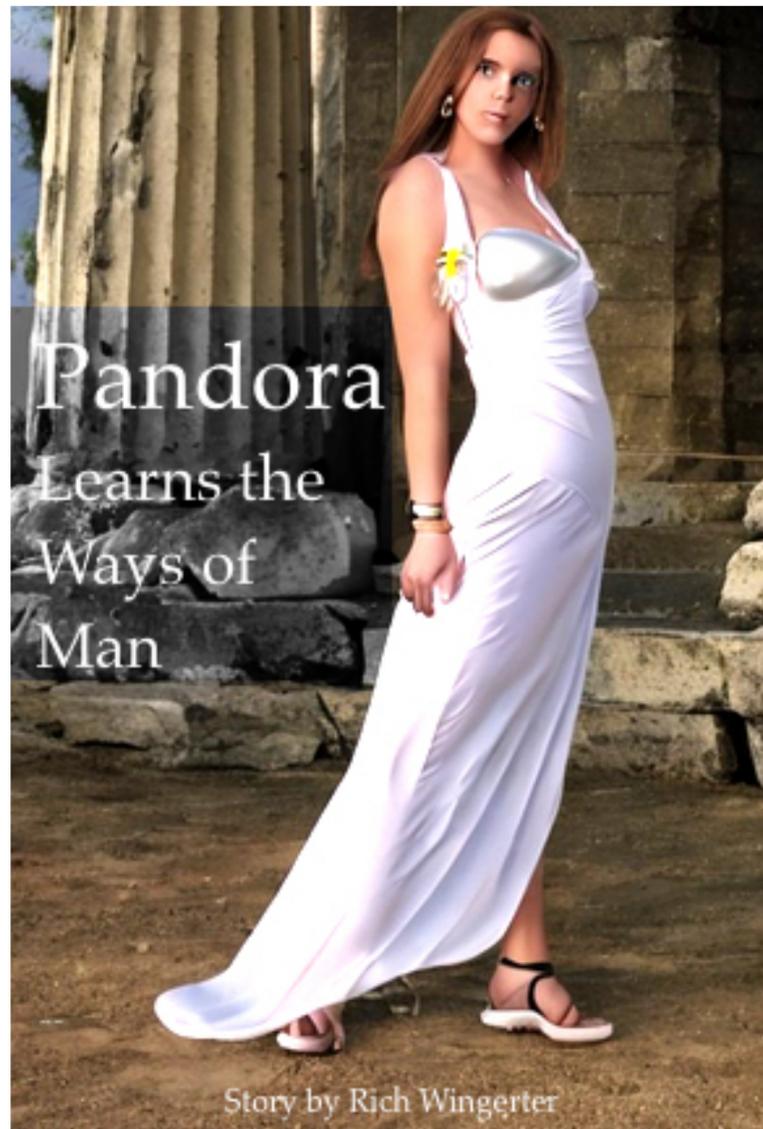
Feature Length
Animation · Family · Holiday

A young elf, who likes to steal from a nearby human village, must choose between a life of crime or a life with the elfa he loves--and the future of children.

Interests

Animation, Christmas, Coming of Age, Fairy Tale, Love Story, Music, Romantic

Screenplays Available



Pandora's Destiny

Pandora Learns the Ways of Man

Feature Length

Animation · Romance · Young Adult

Angered when Prometheus gives man fire, Zeus sends Pandora to destroy man. But Pandora has her own ideas.

Interests

Animation, Coming of Age, Disaster, Epic, Mythical, Romantic

Screenplays Available



Looker

Short (15 pages)

Thriller · Supernatural

A woman hates the glare of a man on the street, but when she confronts him, he gives her what she asks for.

Interests

Character Driven, Social Life, Spiritual

Screenplays Available



The Dollhouse

Short (5 pages)
Family · Supernatural

When a little girl gets a giant dollhouse in her backyard for her fourth birthday, she's startled to find fairies have taken up residence. And worse they demand she turn over her little brother or they'll make her toes curl.

Interests

Children, Fairies, Ethical Dilemmas

Screenplays Available



Roving Reporter

TV Pilot (6 pages)
Comedy · Political Satire

Due to budget cuts, KNRD moved their roving reporter to a sound stage, where she interviews the top Democratic presidential candidate--who isn't cooperative.

Interests

Political, Satire, Spoof

References

- Images include:
 - Photos purchased from iStockPhoto and images created by Stable Diffusion, from Google Street View, and other materials.
- Musical references:
 - Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade*, Movement III, "The Young Prince and the Young Princess".
 - Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky: *Pictures at an Exhibition*, "Promenade".
 - Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti: Sonata in E major. K. 531.
 - Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti: Sonata in E major. K. 380.
 - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Concerto No. 10.
 - Alexander Borodin: *Polovtsian Dances*, Konchak [the Khan].
 - Erik Satie: *Gymnopédies*.
 - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata No 16.

Contact

Rich Wingerter

- WrittenByRich@sonic.net
- +1 650-207-8014

