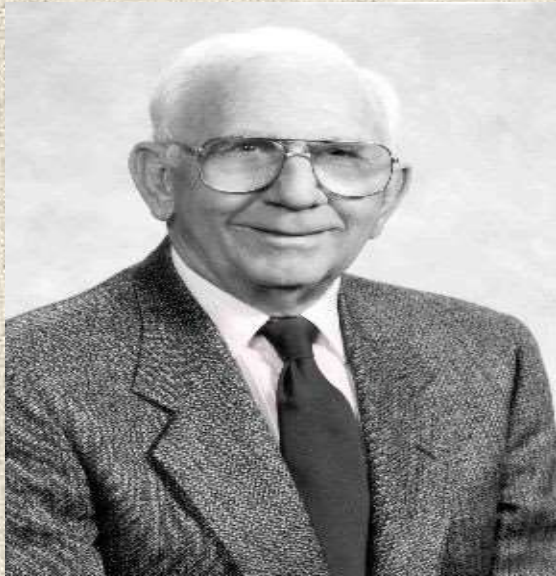


THE THIRD LEVEL

-Jack Finney

About the author



Walter Braden 'Jack Finney' (1911-1995) was an American author. He graduated in 1934 from Knox College, Illinois. He was best known for his science fiction and thrillers. In 1987, he was given the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement.

THEME

'The Third Level' explores the science fiction genre of 'time travel'. It interweaves fantasy with the reality in the most futuristic projection of time travel. The story also dwells on the theme of escapism, not only as a psychological refuge from the grim realities of the present day world but also as a desire to stay with the past or to keep the past alive in the complexities of the present. This story is about time intersection, an illusion, a kind of long dream that we do not experience during our sleep.

SUMMARY



Charley , a 31 year old American claims of having been to the third level of the Grand Central Station, New York City. However, the rail

authorities swear of only two levels.

Charley consults his psychiatrist friend who calls it 'a waking-dream wish fulfilment'.

His wife, Louisa became worried.



LOUISA



CHARLEY PSYCHIATRIST



The friend explains that the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war and worry. Therefore, he wants to escape into the world of dreams and fancies – the third level. His stamp collecting is nothing but a ‘temporary refuge from reality’.



One night Charley is in a hurry to get to his apartment and takes the subway from Grand Central . He goes down the steps to the first level and then to the second level. The suburban trains like the Twentieth Century leave from there. He ducks into an arched-doorway heading for the subway and gets lost.



It is quite easy to get lost in the Grand Central. It is growing like a tree with endless corridors, doorways and staircases like roots. Charley finds himself on the third level.





On the third level, Charley discovers a different world of open-flame gaslights and brass spittoons.

Men were dressed like 1890s with derby hats, black four-button suits with tiny lapels.



They had old-fashioned beards, sideburns and handlebar moustaches.



Women wore dresses with leg-of-mutton sleeves and skirts to the top of their high-buttoned shoes.

Charley catches a glimpse of a Currier and Ives locomotive with a funnel-shaped stack.





Charley walks over to a newsboy and glances at the newspaper, 'The World', dated 11th June 1894, with the lead story about President Cleveland.



Charley goes to the ticket counter to get two tickets, for himself and Louisa, for Galesburg, Illinois.



Galesburg is a wonderful town with big houses, huge lawns, plenty of trees and people with lots of leisure time.



At the ticket counter, the clerk is surprised to see different kinds of notes in Charley's hands.

He warns him, *"That ain't money, mister."*

Charley turns away and gets out fast, lest he be put behind the bars.



(1890s)



(1950s)



Next day, desperate to go to Galesburg, Charley exchanges new for old currency at the coin dealer's store. He gets less than 200 in old-style bills for his 300 dollars. But he never again finds the corridor that leads to the third level at the Grand Central Station.

Louisa gets pretty worried and does not want her husband, Charley to look for the third level. Meanwhile, his friend Sam Weiner disappears, nobody knows where. He suspects Sam to be in Galesburg, Illinois in 1894, as he is fond of the place.

Charley again engages himself with his stamps. Among the first-day covers, he finds an envelope addressed to his grandfather at his home in Galesburg.



(First day cover- an envelope postmarked with a stamp on the first day it is issued)

The postmark showed the date, 18th July, 1894. The stamp was a six-cent, dull brown, with a picture of President Garfield. Surprisingly, he had never seen it before in his grandfather's collection.

The paper inside was not blank this time. It read:

*941 Willard Street
Galesburg, Illinois
July 18, 1894*

Charley

I got to wishing that you were right. Then I got to believing you were right. And, Charley, it's true; I found the third level! I've been here two weeks, and right now, down the street at the Daly's, someone is playing a piano, and they're all out on the front porch singing 'Seeing Nelly Home.' And I'm invited over for lemonade. Come on back, Charley and Louisa. Keep looking till you find the third level! It's worth it, believe me!

Sam

The letter asserts the presence of the third level and Sam is there. Charley rushes to the stamp and coin store and finds that Sam had bought old currency worth eight hundred dollars. Sam it seems was not sceptical of the third level as he had appeared. While Charley discovers the third level accidentally, for Sam it is planned. The most mysterious thing was that Sam was his psychiatrist.



**SAM WEINER,
THE PSYCHIATRIST**

THANK YOU