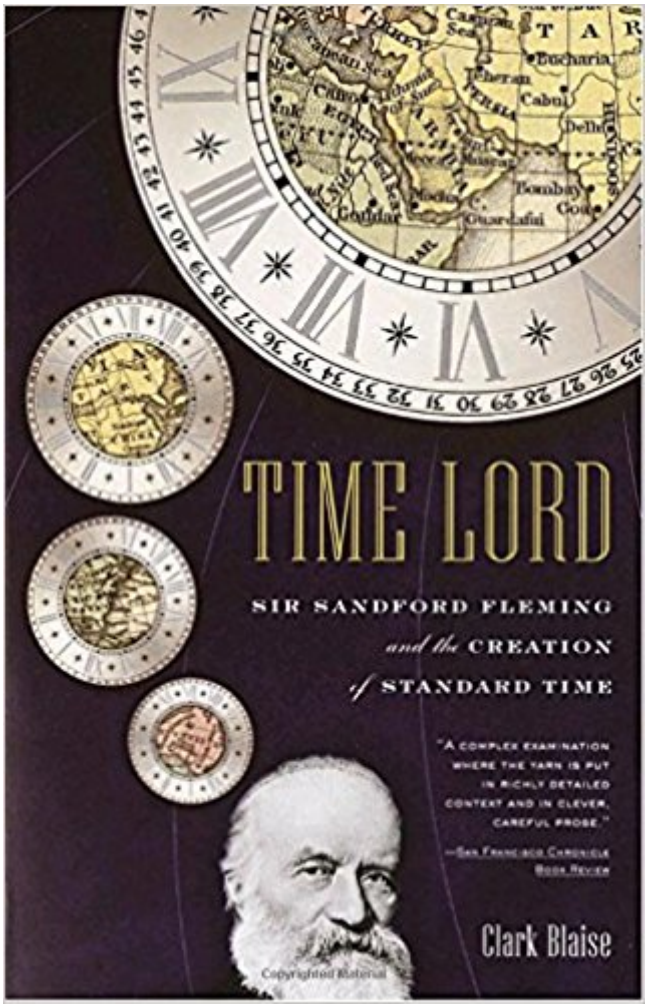
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Time Lord: Sir Sandford Fleming And The Creation Of Standard Time



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Synopsis

It is difficult today to imagine life before standard time was established in 1884. In the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, there were 144 official time zones in North America alone. The confusion that ensued, especially among the burgeoning railroad companies, was an hourly comedy of errors that ultimately threatened to impede progress. The creation of standard time, with its two dozen global time zones, is one of the great inventions of the Victorian Era, yet it has been largely taken for granted.In Time Lord, Clark Blaise re-creates the life of Sanford Fleming, who struggled to convince the world to accept standard time. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a fascinating story of science, politics, nationalism, and the determined vision of one man who changed the world. Set in a time marked by substantial technological and cultural transformation, Time Lord is also an erudite exploration of art, literature, consciousness, and our changing relationship to time

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Customer Reviews

In the 1880s, a businessman traveling by train from New York to Boston needed, on arrival, to adjust his clock, moving it ahead by 12 minutes. The strange increment, writes Clark Blaise, was a matter of local interpretation, some enterprising Bostonian having determined that the rising sun touched the shore of Massachusetts a dozen minutes before warming Manhattan. Such local interpretations of time made the job of establishing railroad schedules a matter of guesswork and hope, as the Canadian entrepreneur Sandford Fleming discovered when he missed a train in the west of Ireland in 1876. Frustrated, Fleming realized that a new system of universal time would

need to be created if railroad travel were ever to realize its full potential. As Blaise writes, "the adoption of standard time for the world was as necessary for commercial advancement as the invention of the elevator was for modern urban development," and nations such as England that had a system of standard time in place owed much of their economic superiority to the predictability and reliability such a system put in place. Fleming discovered that getting the world onto the same schedule required years of negotiating and browbeating, a nightmare that Blaise ably recounts. Fleming's efforts eventually paid off, and as Blaise writes, "Of all the inventions of the Industrial Age, standard time has endured, virtually unchanged, the longest." His entertaining account of how that came to be will be of appeal to readers who enjoyed Dava Sobel's Longitude, Henry Petroski's The Pencil, and other popular works in the history of technology. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Although he had consulted his guide to Irish railroad travel for the correct time of his train's departure, Sanford Fleming discovered that the train scheduled to depart at 5:35 p.m. would actually depart 12 hours later, at 5:35 a.m. Prior to 1884, conflicts like Fleming's were not unusual since time was not standardized as it is today. Determined to impose a rational order over something so elusive, Fleming, a Canadian engineer and surveyor, turned his attention to the creation of a standard global time based on a 24-hour clock, which he presented to an assemblage of leaders from around the world in 1884 at the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C. After much scrutiny and debate, these leaders accepted Fleming's proposal, agreeing that the day would begin at midnight and establishing both the Prime Meridian at Greenwich and the International Dateline. Blaise's splendid account traces Fleming's starring role as the creator of a method of measuring time that rules people's lives even today. Blaise, author of 15 previous books of both fiction and nonfiction (Brief Parables of the Twentieth Century: New and Selected Stories, etc.), presents an important history of ideas and examines how this invisible yet remarkable technological achievement of the Victorian era, a period marked by a dogged confidence in its own capacity for progress, changed the world. Blaise writes with perfect pitch and graceful narrative; his most beautiful chapter explores the ways that writers like Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf manipulated time in their work even as they were constrained by it. (Apr. 20) Forecast: Every popular science book that comes down the pike these days is compared by its publisher to Dava Sobel's Longitude. But this beautiful little book may really follow in Sobel's footsteps. Blaise's six-city author tour (San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, Iowa City, Seattle and Portland, Ore.) can only help to garner attention.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to

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What one would want to see in a book about "Sir Sandford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time" would be a biography of Fleming, some historical background on timekeeping up to the time of the standardization of time, and perhaps some material evaluating the contributions of Fleming and such others as William Allen and Charles Dowd to the process. In fact, the book is pretty good regarding Fleming’s biography, but has an incomplete summary of the historical background, and a little on the roles of Dowd and Allen. And it has a large amount of irrelevant material, which I found tedious to read, eager to get on to something more relevant.Much of the book, in fact the whole ninth chapter as well as other portions, is taken up with relating standard time to various literary works, a relationship that isn’t there and diverts the reader from what really matters. And to expect the reader to be familiar with writers from Flaubert to Joyce is too much, yet when he supplies the specifics of what he is talking about, as in a reference to Conan Doyle’s characterization of Sherlock Holmes, he really gives no more insight into the standardization of time. I felt like telling the author to please can the literary criticism and get on with the task at hand.This is not a book I would recommend, except that I know of no better one on the topic.

Although Time Lord weighs in at fewer than 250 pages, this book took me a great deal of time to read in part because it constantly put me to sleep. Usually the combination of history/biography/science is favorite of mine, and finding out where our notion of time originated sounded like a fascinating topic to me. In the end, however, the story just isn’t that exciting and it felt like the author was padding the book with unrelated filler material.To be fair, Sir Sanford Fleming is an interesting and admirable character. Intelligent and hard working, he was a self-made man who emigrated from Scotland to North America to seek his fortunes. In addition to the creation of standard time, he was also largely responsible for the trans-Pacific cable and the trans-Canadian railway.While Fleming’s accomplishments are all duly noted by the author, much of the book felt like filler material. Entire chapters are spent waxing philosophical about the "nature of time" and how various notions of time affected everything from art to literature. If you happen to have done postgraduate study in art or literature, you may genuinely enjoy these distractions, but I found them to be a bit too much. Blaise spends as much time (one chapter) discussing Sherlock Holmes as he does discussing the actual Prime Meridian Conference.Time Lord is not without its pleasures. It is truly fascinating to read how the world worked (or attempted to work) with an infinite number of local times, and how the advent of rail travel in particular created the need for time standardization. It was

also interesting and, at times, amusing to study the role politics and national pride (particularly between the British and the French) played in the entire affair. Unfortunately such topics do not constitute the majority of the book, as they are what I was most looking for.If you or the person you are shopping for enjoy this genre, you might first want to consider The Measure of All Things (which chronicles the creation of the meter) or Pendulum (on the life of Leon Foucault), both of which I found to be more enjoyable reading than Time Lord.

In his book "Time Lord" Clark Blaise takes our "time" to show off his knowledge of Art and Literature under the guise of writing about Sir Sandford Fleming: a man who claims to have created "standard time" The biographical stuff on Fleming could have been handled in one chapter or less. In fact, most of it was probably cropped from Fleming's egotistically titled autobiography Empire-Builder.Blaise takes any opportunity to link a subject he knows well to time. He would have the ability to link a sentence such as: "Van Gogh took his time in painting" to a chapter on Van Gogh's artistic style. Actually, he mentions Van Gogh's interest in Japanese woodcuts nearly as often as he mentions Fleming and his debacle with the Canadian Pacific Railway.By stating that `works of art are timeless', Blaise is able to launch into nearly a whole chapter on a painting by Gustave Caillebotte. While that may have been of interest to art students, it added little to one's understanding of Sanford Fleming or standard time.What started off as an interesting read about time, turned into a boring display of Clark Blaise's knowledge of art and literature. He drops hundreds of famous names in art as a way of showing that he knows who they were and his reader may not. As the former head of the International Writing Program at University of Iowa, he should know better. My rating of this book 2 stars, but you may stop after Part One. The rest is fluff.Richard Stampfle Nong Khai, Thailand

"Time Lord" describes the development of the standard time zones arising from an epoch in which time was always local because travel distance was limited. With the advent of rail and steamship travel the need for standardization became imperative. The story is unfortunately handicapped by a pretentious writing style that appears to go off onto tangents unrelated to the the biograhical material or the historical material. The chapter "The Aesthetics of Time", on first reading, appears to have been an essay inadvertently bound into the book with no seeming relationship to the topic. I have read this chapter twice and can find no purpose to the chapter other than to dazzle (or more appropriately confuse) the reader with the writer's literary erudition. This had the potential to rival Dava Sobel's " Longitude" but falls short.

The book spends a lot more time talking about Fleming and things going on around the time of his life and less on the specific topic of the creation and adoption of standard time - definitely not what I expected given the title.

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