I always knew that my uncle was an inventor of some sort, but I did not realize that his greatest invention would end up being a Wayback Machine. Whenever our family saw him over the holidays, he would ramble on and on about how he would build an actual time machine. My parents just laughed at him, thinking that he watched way too many science fiction movies. I guess he eventually became fed up with our teasing, because one day he simply ceased to answer our phone calls and dinner invitations. This radio silence went on for about fifteen years, until just recently when I received news that my uncle passed away from a stroke. My parents were obviously devastated, but I did not feel relatively any emotion at all. The last time I saw him was when I five, so I only had vague images of the man in my head. Apparently, I meant a lot more to him than my parents, because I seemed to be the only person included in his will. In it he left me his “greatest invention of all”. I was obviously shocked when I stumbled upon the Wayback. In fact, it just appeared to be an elevator that opened before me. The interior was bizarre. The room was completely white, and the only thing in it seemed to be a pitch black television screen that was transfixed to the wall. I was confused at first, but the will listed how to start the machine. All I had to do was say what year I wanted to travel to, and the screen would match what I said. I had to think about it for a while. I wanted to put myself into something exciting and adventurous, but nothing relatively new. I also wanted to put myself into a historical event that I knew almost nothing about. After some thought, I decided to travel back to the First Crusade. A quick Google search gave me the location and date. I told the computer to send me to the town of Clermont on November 27, 1095. The computer then asked for my new identity and socioeconomic status. I decided that I would be a Norman knight by the name of Lambert. I would be an expert in cavalry and swordplay, and be fluent in French and Latin. I was also equipped with a watch that could fast forward time and send me back to the present in case I was in trouble. After I confirmed the information on the screen, the door closed and the machine began to shake violently. The last thing I remembered was an overwhelming flash of bright light as I fell to the floor. I woke up to find myself in a field just outside of Clermont. After I dusted off all of the grass and dirt from my cloak, I decided to follow the mass of people pouring in from the road. Many of them traveled on horseback, and wore the same type of robes that I wore. Others traveled by foot, only clothed in mere rags. I figured these people to be peasants, and their rugged appearance made me feel sorry for them. But there was a general wave of excitement in the air, as everybody seemed to be relived to arrive at their destination. I blended in with the crowd as best as I could, and as we moved towards the center of town, I tried to catch snippets of conversation to see what was going on. Pope Urban II himself had been in Clermont for over a week to hold a church council concerning reform and barbarian forces such as the Vikings and Magyars.[[1]](#endnote-1) Today marked the last day of deliberations, and the Pope was going to give an announcement in the center of town. Among other meaningless eavesdrops, I began to hear talk of Saracens attacking pilgrims on the road to the Holy Land and repeated Muslim attacks in Sicily and Spain.[[2]](#endnote-2) The atrocities and actions described actually sent shivers down my spine. These pilgrims traveled hundreds of miles in peace only to be slaughtered and desecrated. I could only hope that I did not end up like them. We arrived in the square just as the Pope was about to begin his speech. The crowd fell silent as the Pope took a seat in the middle of the stage. He sighed, cleared his throat, and began to deliver his news. He had received a letter from Emperor Alexius of Byzantium that requested urgent support to drive out the Seljuk Turks that posed a threat to his empire.[[3]](#endnote-3) This, I found out later, was no surprise to the people. In 1071, the Byzantines suffered a devastating loss at Manzikert, and years later lost the Christian city of Antioch.[[4]](#endnote-4) It was about time the Emperor asked for help. After describing with vivid detail of Turkish behavior to us (which almost made me vomit on the noble in front of me), the Pope reached the climax of his speech. He called upon us to take up arms and take the Holy Land by force. We had to “boldly advance as knights of Christ” and “wrest that land from the wicked race”.[[5]](#endnote-5) To top it off, full remissions of sin were offered to whoever perished in the process. With this statement Urban cleverly sealed off any doubt toward the journey ahead. People could travel in armed pilgrimages, plunder and loot at their leisure, and have nothing to fear. Pilgrims could travel with protection, and warriors could do anything they want as long as they took the Cross. I was almost trampled beneath the crowd as everyone rushed home to gather their belongings. After I managed to push and shove my way out of there, I took a minute to see what I had on me. To my dismay, I only had my uncle’s will and the watch. I had no means to buy my crusading supplies. Who’s ever heard of a noble with no cash? I was about to travel back in the present and give up until I noticed a group of noblemen who were standing in a line in front of the cathedral. Upon further examination, I noticed that they were giving pieces of parchment to a bishop who would then give them a large sum of money.[[6]](#endnote-6) When I approached the bishop with my uncle’s will in hand, I almost expected him to give me a strange look, but all he said was that I have an impressive amount of land. Now I was the one who gave him a strange look. Apparently I didn’t examine the will closely, because it was now my proof of land ownership. The bishop made it quite clear that I would not recover my land until my pledge was fulfilled.[[7]](#endnote-7) I told him I understood. I was then blessed with a considerable sum of money. After receiving some directions to the nearest blacksmith and stable, I purchased a quality set of chainmail, a sword, a lance, and a stallion.[[8]](#endnote-8) I was now ready to embark on the Crusades. I decided to fast forward a little bit after I purchased my supplies. If what I remembered from high school was right, I would dodge the total massacre that was the People’s Crusade. Before the official crusade, peasants from Northern France armed themselves to march across Germany.[[9]](#endnote-9) They managed to make it as far Civitot before they were wiped out by the Turks in 1096.[[10]](#endnote-10) The other reason why I skipped the People’s Crusades is due to the destruction and slaughter of Jewish communities on the march towards Hungary[[11]](#endnote-11). The Turks were the real targets. I was now at the siege of Nicea on May 21, 1097.[[12]](#endnote-12) I was teleported to the main camp of the crusaders, who were camped just on the outskirts of the fortified city. I was initially struck by the diversity of roles in the camp. I only pictured knights, archers and foot soldiers, but there were also engineers and technicians that worked on siege weapons and a multitude of servants for did chores around the camp.[[13]](#endnote-13) After asking around at the camp, I realized I was in a camp completely filled with fellow Normans. My commanding officer was Bohemond, an experienced warrior renowned for his fights against the Greeks.[[14]](#endnote-14) I was just about to make my way over to the command tent and introduce myself, but before I could we were suddenly called to arms by the man himself. All of the cavalry formed a line with their lances forward, with foot soldiers at the ready behind. Bohemond rode up in front of us and told us not to fear. Honestly, he did not look like most warriors. He towered over the rest of us, and cut his hair short, as opposed to the traditional long hair style worn by warriors. He then gave the signal to charge and attack the garrison stationed in front of the gates. I made sure to stay behind most of the knights, as I was a little uneasy at the sight of the enemy. The Turks also had cavalry but their horses seemed to outrun ours and even run circles around us. They never got too close, but just enough to get a good shot with their bows before backing off. We didn’t give them much of a chance, as we stayed together and hunted them down as a pack. I even managed to strike down one as he fell from his horse. With the garrison gone and the enemy still besieged inside, all we could do on wait. We had siege artillery but the weapons could only fire small rocks.[[15]](#endnote-15) All we could is just sit there and starve out the enemy. Then we had a break about a month later. During this period our engineers were busy constructing a battering ram and scaling ladders to launch a full scale assault.[[16]](#endnote-16) I was ecstatic. Now I could experience some close hand-to-hand combat. But right before our attack, we noticed a sentry raise a flag over the battlements. When the troops saw this, all of them groaned. Alexius had actually cut a secret surrender with the Turks.[[17]](#endnote-17) Apparently relations with the emperor were strained. Before being shipped across the Bosphurus, all of the commanders had to pledge an oath of allegiance and fealty to him.[[18]](#endnote-18) Most of them did not wish to do so, but after some persuasion (lavish feasts and gifts), all but one gave in. Bohemond apparently refused even after he was shown the gifts, but once they were taken away, he pledged the oath. [[19]](#endnote-19) After hearing this I lost tremendous respect for him. I wish I could say I was happy for the victory, but I was actually disappointed. After a month of siege and a whole city to plunder, we lost it to the Byzantines. I fast forwarded from there to Antioch. This was another siege battle. We routed the garrison at the gates and then besieged the city for two weeks.[[20]](#endnote-20) By this time we were pretty low on supplies. I went with Raymond and Bohemond’s group to forage, but we suddenly encountered a Muslim army from Damascus that tried to relieve the siege.[[21]](#endnote-21) Many of our men were caught off guard in the ambush and slain right in front of me. Bohemond however rallied us to form a defensive line, effectively killing the relieving army. Now the only problem was getting into the fort. But our commander persuaded an enemy captain to let us up on the siege wall. [[22]](#endnote-22) We all used ladders to climb up the battlements and slay the sentries. It didn’t take long afterwards to take over the fort. However, another relieving army can by and we ourselves became the besieged. Food supplies ran dangerously low. Then a miracle happened. The Holy Lance was dug up from the church.[[23]](#endnote-23) The bishop of Lu Puy used this as a rallying sign, and we all charged out of the gates to meet our attackers. [[24]](#endnote-24) We were facing sheer slaughter. But surprisingly, the enemy fell back. I know it sounds sappy, but I believe a miracle truly did happen at the siege of Antioch. I then used my fast forward to arrive at Jerusalem. It was a horrible time. The enemy had poisoned the wells outside of the city, effectively cutting off our water supply.[[25]](#endnote-25) We were desperate for another miracle. The bishops called on us walk around the walls barefoot and pray to God. If we did this then within nine days the city would be ours.[[26]](#endnote-26) Of course, I was desperate so I joined in. We were ridiculed and spit upon the defenders.[[27]](#endnote-27) But that was alright. I fully believed that we would be victorious in the end. Our engineers constructed siege towers, and we actually got them close enough to the walls to jump over the battlements.[[28]](#endnote-28) It was all over for them. We took out the guards on the battlements, and then worked our way throughout the city. A lot of the enemy took refuge on rooftops or in temples and sanctuaries. I expected my contemporaries to allow them to surrender. What happened next I can never get out of my head we stormed Solomon’s Temple and we killed so many Turks that we were up to our knees in their blood.[[29]](#endnote-29) I could only watch in horror as they slaughtered everybody including the women and children. I couldn’t take it any longer. I decided to go back to the present. I always thought the Crusades were going to be epic and heroic. What I saw at Jerusalem changed my whole perspective on the knights. I thought knights were chivalrous and honorable. But there was nothing honorable about that massacre in Solomon’s Temple. It made me really wonder if the knights were just as evil as the Muslims.

1. Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See the German pilgrimage of 1064 in Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 33-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ereira, Alan, and Terry Jones. *Crusades*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995, 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Taken from the excerpts of Urban II’s speech in Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 39-41. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Land, offices, and tithes were among a few ways to obtain loans, see Riley-Smith, Jonathan Simon Christopher. *The First Crusaders: 1095-1131*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For a more detailed list of supplies, see *The First Crusaders: 1095-1131*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 110-111 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 57. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ereira, Alan, and Terry Jones. *Crusades*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995, 28-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Mayer, Hans Eberhard. *The Crusades*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Oldenbourg, Zoé. *The Crusades*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966, 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ereira, Alan, and Terry Jones. *Crusades*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Mayer, Hans Eberhard. *The Crusades*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ereira, Alan, and Terry Jones. *Crusades*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Foss, Michael. *People of the First Crusade*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1997, 104. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Oldenbourg, Zoé. *The Crusades*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966, 134. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 140 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)