

"And History Passed Them Over"

The Defense Minister rolled his speech out forcefully to the end.

"Has there been any year without its threat of war? Has there been any year when we were as prepared as we are now? They have already made their intentions clear. They are afraid! The guerrillas strike on both fronts, small skirmishes, never enough to incite our people to war.

"They are careful. They know that we will win, and They dare not confront our full power.

"It's Us against Them. Now, against the Past and Future. The Great Time Wars have not fully begun. But when they do..

"Our brave archaeologists already unearth the Past's secrets. Each day we dig deeper into Their vaults, a trove of tactical knowledge.

"On the other front, our intrepid soothsayers are closer than ever to decoding the time streams' vibrations. They will make clear the Future's treacherous path.

"These are the spies with which we prepare for the coming war.

"And this we already know. They are merely the un-tested Past, the battle-weary Future. We, as the Present will emerge victorious! We have the experience, the matchless vigor, and we must be ready to meet our enemies.

"God has placed us between two powerful foes so that we could not be weak. We know our history and our destiny. We know that we must endure!"

As the finale barreled into the audience, breaking them into raucous applause, the Minister lowered his head slightly to hear an aide just rushed to his side.

He followed the adjutant briskly down a side passage off the main parliament chambers. The network of bland corridors and half-flight staircases wound through the warren of real government, far away from the public-facing showrooms. This was where the work was done. This was where the historians sent their reports for analysis. This was where the soothsayers sat tensed, tuned to the twists of the Future's every move. Out of this door came fliers with slogans like "The history of all society is the struggle against history!" Past that door was every report of a Time Jumped enemy skirmisher, darting into our world, striking, and Jumping back home to Their times..

At last, he entered the crux of his Ministry, the War Room. Steady chatter droned back and forth across the long central table, and on it the one report at the crux of the room's tense energy.

The group quieted, and the Ministers' deputy explained, with perhaps more color than penetrated an official military document.

Something big was coming. There were new quivers in the time streams from the Future. And archaeologists across the world had just discovered new intelligence about the Past. They were collaborating, the two of Them. Then against Us.

Flash A new report shot from hand to hand down the table. New evidence of just what was coming our way, our when.

The prehistorics had their nuclear bomb. That had used the conversion between mass and energy, two forms of the same stuff. " $E=mc^2$," and all that. A tiny particle of matter "m" was unleashed as a tremendous blast of energy "E." It was an elegant concept, if now out of date.

The Past had been exploring that, but not to make new atom bombs. Mass and energy were the same together as mass-energy. But Time, it was the same as Space, together as space-time. A split second of time was equal, under the laws of relativity, to a huge distance across space.

A Time Bomb! It would take a moment of time, and create an empty gulf in the middle of any target.

This came more colorfully described than in the report. And for that, it was more effective. They were working on this. We needed to, as well. We couldn't last with a Time Bomb Gap, regardless of what the Minister had assured Parliament.

"How could we defend..."

"Could we detect an inbound..."

"How quickly could we build..."

Snippets of conversation collided around the room. We had to deploy a new corps of temporal scientists, along with the historians and fortune tellers, to sniff out exactly what the Past was up to.

Flash Another fragment from the front. A Time Bomb had been built, and buried in the Earth! It wasn't detected in a time jump. It hadn't been jumped. It was sent the long way, waiting under our feet over the years and centuries and millennia. It's already here, and it always has been.

The Earth shattered. The conversion of a fraction of a second was enough to blow the planet apart in its orbit. Only a gaping sphere of debris was left, colliding with itself, catching fire, then freezing, then drifting.

If only the archaeologists had dug faster, and reconstructed the coded messages from Past to Future. Those missives were now spread out as time capsules in what used to be Earth's orbit, waiting to be picked up. If only the fortune tellers had decoded the replies rushing back from the Future.

The Past and Future had conspired in a catastrophic strike on the Now. Now's Earth was gone. In the aftermath of the attack, the Past had Jumped their whole planet forward in time. The Past Jumped forward to become the founding seed of the Future. They leapfrogged the orphaned in-between time.

The Now was a dead end, and history passed them over.