

# GLIMPSE



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*“Based on what we now know of temporal mechanics, we can say with some degree of certainty that there is no link between linearity and causality.”*

*--Dr. Theodore L. Mobius, in 2195, at the Thirtieth Annual Symposium on Quantum and Temporal Logic.*

*“The latest theories of time suggest that causality might often fit into linearity. The old question of what happens if you travel back in time and kill your father before you were born is irrelevant, because such an event is impossible. Instead, the latest thinking suggests that there is no inconsistency in the notion that you can travel back in time and save your father from dying before you were born.”*

*--Arthur Hampton, in 2203, in a highly disregarded and largely unpublished paper that offered contrarian views to the other temporal theories of the period.*

*“In the twenty-third century, we wage war to protect our temporal interests. The battle to survive beyond the invention of proper time-shifting instrumentation is the basis of our existence, for if we lose, then our lives could forever be erased from the pages of history. The ability to alter the past of one’s enemies is victory.”*

*--Syril Patrean, Leader of the Spyglass sect of humanity, in 2204, at the outset of the Temporal Wars.*

*“We do not live in time. We live in space, and time ages us.”*

*--Dr. Natasha Princh, head of the DeMO (Delayed Memory Optimization) project of the Spyglass sect, in 2205.*

## Glimpse by Christopher J. Mercer

The first dream was disturbing only in its simplicity. There were twelve figures, all in long, flowing robes, all marching in a strange procession. Their faces were covered by hoods that extended out several inches from their noses. As they walked, so slowly and peacefully, there was a rhythm formed by their footsteps. Like a heartbeat, pumping blood through a body, they twisted and turned across the unformed room, marching to a beat that must have dwelled within them. Though their path was not a direct route, it was clear that they were approaching him. And he knew instantly that a great event was about to occur. And he was the center of that event.

But for what purpose? Why was he The One? And what was his role?

The figures drew close, breaking ranks and forming a circle around him. A pounding within him grew faster—surely his heart beating at a more rapid pace. Was it confusion? Anticipation? Excitement? Certainly he knew, or had known once before. His name echoed throughout the caverns of his mind. Torah Behing. Torah Behing.

The circle was complete. All twelve figures stopped and faced him. There was a pause, and then slowly, they looked up, arms raised. He looked up as well, and saw the machine, floating overhead. There was a light, and then utter darkness. Peace resided in him.

He awoke with a start, hearing voices and scuffling around him. His eyes opened just as he was hit in the gut with a long, metal stick.

“Who are you?”

“Torah Behing.”

“Who?”

He swallowed. His body felt unusual, though at the same time, he lacked a point of reference with which to compare his feelings. He knew he felt strange. But the characteristics of normal eluded him. All that he knew was his name.

“Torah Behing.”

A pause. There was a person hovering over him. His eyes closed again. It was so hard to focus. The stick struck him across the face this time. He felt pain, but what did that mean? His hand reached up to touch his cheek.

“Where did you come from?”

He had no answers, and his silence indicated an unwillingness to cooperate.

“Pick him up.”

Two hands grabbed him, one under either arm, and lifted him to his feet. He opened his eyes again. A rough, unshaven face filled his vision. And there were scars on that face.

“I am Commander Deere of the Spyglass Sect. You will respond to the questions that I ask you.” Deere looked him straight in the eyes with a heated temper that made him wince. “Where are you from?”

“I do not know.” The words came to him easily, though he did not know how he had learned them.

“How do you not know where you are from?”

“I do not know.”

Deere’s stare lasted a moment longer. “Take him down to DeMO. Have Dr. Princh run an ID on him. I want to know where this man is from.”

Torah glanced to his left, and then to his right, as the two men holding him aloft began leading him down a long metallic hallway. He faded out of consciousness.

“Interesting.” This voice was much more pleasing, and it came from a woman directly in front of him. Torah’s eyes opened and closed in the bright lights of a laboratory. “Now look into the lens,” she said, soothingly. He already liked this woman more than Commander Deere.

He made every effort to comply, although his head rolled about in agony. His entire body ached like he had been dropped on the ground from a great height. His eyes finally adjusted to the light, and he looked into the equipment that hovered in front of him. A tight red beam scanned his eye for two brief seconds, then stopped. The machine lifted away, leaving the source of the female voice sitting in front of him.

She was an attractive, appealing woman, with long brown hair and a soft face. Her eyes were dark and non-threatening. He felt immediately as if a connection had been made.

“I can’t figure out who you are.”

“Torah Behing.”

“So you told Commander Deere. But there is no Torah Behing in our records. And your fingerprints don’t match anything on file. Nor does your retinal scan.” She paused, and he could sense the confusion in her mind. “Everyone is on file, you understand.”

He shook his head. He didn’t understand at all. His name kept repeating itself over and over in his mind. And he could evidently speak, although he had no idea how he had learned to do so.

“I’m Dr. Natasha Princh. Welcome to my lab on Titan. Do you have any idea how you got here?” She studied him carefully, noting each movement, each facial reaction.

“No.”

“Are you even familiar with this place? Did you know it existed?”

This took a little more thought, but he shook his head.

She paused before asking the next question. “Do you know what year it is?”

“No.”

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“2206, and welcome to it. Sorry to say that it isn’t much for visitors. We’ve had it pretty rough since the war started two years ago. It used to be such a peaceful universe.”

A door opened behind her, and the jagged face of Commander Deere stepped inside. “And?”

“He isn’t on record.”

“Then kill him.”

“No. I don’t think so.”

They glowered at each other for several seconds. Deere shut the door. “He could be a spy sent by the Tre-nets.”

“Again, I don’t think so.”

“How do you know?”

“Why would they send a traitor into our midst who doesn’t know who he is?”

“How about, maybe they’re hoping that he’d run into someone sympathetic to his cause. You of all people should be concerned about him.” Deere was always on guard, always ready to fight. But once the door was shut, and the conversation was isolated between him and the doctor, there was a difference in his behavior.

“I know. Maybe that’s what it is. I want to analyze him for my project.”

Deere considered this. “I want him guarded by two men at all times. There will be no chance for him to escape. And he is not to be allowed near weapons of any kind.” With that, Deere stormed out of the room to assign people to the task he had created.

Dr. Princh sighed and turned back to her new patient. “You’ll have to excuse Commander Deere. His job is winning the war. And that’s all we’ve known for the last few years. Even before the wars started, tensions were building. Since I was born, I can’t remember a truly peaceful time.”

“What are the wars about?”

He understood the questions and had no problems intelligently asking them, she noticed. He spoke Enhanced Basic very well. Where was he from, she wondered, that he didn’t know about the wars?

She turned off a piece of equipment. “Forty years ago, a group of scientists made vast leaps in the field of temporal physics. It was believed that we were on the verge of being able to send someone back and forth in time. As the technologies grew out of this, it became obvious to many that the ability to send people back in time could prove to be the greatest weapon of all. One race could go back and eliminate another before it began. Small men with big ideas and almost no wisdom began to hire on the brightest minds that they could find to explore the realm of temporal mechanics. For over thirty years, scientists throughout the sector tried to work together to understand the issues involved. But even as we learned

more about how it might be possible to send someone through time, the effects of doing so became hotly disputed. Do you understand all of this?"

Torah nodded. He had no idea where he had learned the concepts of time or of anything at all, for that matter. But everything made sense as she said it.

"There are several schools of thought about time, but two that are taken the most seriously. One school suggests that time operates linearly. In other words, a person could never go back in time and change events that would prevent him or her from existing, because that would create a paradox. As people, we tend to think in these linear terms. But science has opened the field and suggests that there are other possibilities. The one that became favored by the majority is about causality. The idea here is very complicated, as things often are when scientists sit down and try to explain things that don't mesh with the way we think. Causality says that you can be born, travel back in time, change the past and erase the timeline that you were born in *without* causing a conflict. You and everyone else simply live out a different existence, one in which you were never born. And the timeline that you were born in is not erased, but never existed in your new universe. It's like you've shifted into a parallel universe that is different and not entirely unrelated to your own.

"Many people find it hard to comprehend this theory, because it doesn't mesh with what we know. But I point out all of the things in history that people didn't understand because their general way of thinking was incorrect. For example, once upon a time, when humans lived only on Earth, we thought that the universe revolved around us and our planet. Once it was proven that this was incorrect, entire concepts were changed. Our way of thinking had to be reconsidered in many areas of our lives. After all, we weren't the center of the universe. Time travel, I think, is similar. We just operate from a certain set of beliefs that have been unchallenged because we haven't known how to challenge them. But all that is changing.

"As people fought more over time travel, the concept of researching it became similar to researching a weapon of mass destruction. The ability to change the past, if done correctly, might allow one set of social agendas to prosper over another. That was how it all started out. People formed alliances based on their social beliefs and then began to recruit scientists to fit their belief systems. Everyone had to do this, because if someone else developed time travel first, they would presumably use it. They had to, or else the next group would. No one wants to live by other people's values. And because this has been the accepted norm for almost ten years, everyone generally believes that it is possible for one group to gain complete knowledge of how to control a time jump and plan the ultimate destruction of its enemies.

“Now, of course, people barely remember or know how their agendas conflict. It isn’t about how we want the universe. It is merely a struggle for survival. Us or them. Any of them. We call ourselves the Spyglass, but I don’t even remember why. There are dozens of other sects stationed around the solar system. We fight battles daily with other groups. And all that we protect are our research facilities, so that no one else might understand what we have discovered about time shifting.”

Torah nodded. This was all clear, for some reason. “Is this what you do? Research on time shifting?”

There was a saddened smile on her face as she shook her head. “No. There are many others here on this base that are concerned with such matters. My job is different. We have the ability to create fully-functioning people to be our army. My job is to program their minds as necessary to accomplish tasks of war. I run a program called DeMO, which stands for Delayed Memory Optimization. You don’t want your opponents to know too much about you. I simply try to program these biologicals to remember things at specific moments. If we send them to attack our enemy’s base, it is important that they not be distracted by superfluous data and not take more information about us to the enemy than is necessary. So, I program sequences into their minds so that they know what they need to accomplish just before the time that they must act. That way, if they are captured, they won’t know anything else about the mission, and they won’t make it impossible for others to finish.”

“Is this productive?” Torah asked. His health was coming back to him now, though he had no idea how he expected to feel.

“Productive?” She laughed. “I don’t really know that any of this is productive. Our lives are about war and self-preservation. Ironic, isn’t it, that our scientific knowledge has made these two things so irrevocably linked. Fighting for peace used to be a philosophical oxymoron two hundred years ago. Now, it isn’t enough. We fight for one reason. To win, to ultimately destroy the past and alter the timeline, and we don’t really know the consequences. All that we have to go by is the word of scholars, scientists, and philosophers, and they can not agree on much in these areas.”

Torah nodded in understanding, but only one question came to him mind, and he didn’t really understand what it meant. “Who am I?”

“That might be one of the most interesting questions I’ve been asked in a long time. I’d like to search your thoughts, if you don’t mind. Are you comfortable with that?”

Torah nodded.

She grabbed another machine and pushed it in front of him. “This won’t hurt a bit. I’m just going to look over your memories and see if there isn’t a clue to who you are.”



She operated the machine with great care, spending several minutes adjusting certain dials and talking to the equipment. Torah sat patiently, waiting for answers. In the end, there were none to give.

“I can’t find any record of anything before Commander Deere found you in the hallway,” she said incredulously. “This is impossible.”

Torah opened his mouth to speak, but an alarm sounded.

Natashia jumped to her feet. “A battle alert. We are under attack. Come on, I’ll take you to the Command Center.”

As they walked out of the room and into the metal hallway beyond, two guards joined their ranks, armed with heavy rifles and trailing Torah by several steps. Natashia raced down the hall, turning left, then right, then right again. The four entered a small room, and the doors shut behind them. “Command Level,” she said, and the room started to rise.

Moments later, the four stepped into a room filled with activity. The alarm bell was quieter in here, obviously so as not to distract the people directing the flow of the battle in space. One man sat in the center of the room, monitoring events around him. Dr. Princh headed up to that man, and Torah Behing followed.

“Syril Patrean, this is Torah Behing,” she said to the man.

He looked over with little interest, then glanced back at a console across the room. “The one Commander Deere found,” he stated simply.

“Yes. I have been examining him.”

“Doctor, you surprise even me. With the possibility of time travel upon us, why do you take such a friendly interest in an unknown such as this man. How do you explain how he got here? Why are there no records of his existence? Why does he not know who he is?”

“He is well guarded. Commander Deere has seen to that. There is no need for concern.”

Syril Patrean glared over at her. “The concern will be yours, Doctor, if it ever becomes warranted.”

Another man at a console shouted across the room. “Engagement in ten seconds, Sir.”

“Very well, Tok,” Cyril obliged. “Is everyone in place?”

“Standard fighting pattern. Four units of ten ships. We outnumber them by twelve ships.”

Natashia grabbed Torah by the arm and pulled him away from the action. In the middle of the room was a three-dimensional holograph that depicted the location of ships in the battle. “We are under attack by the Tre-Nets.”

“How can they win?” Torah asked. “They have less ships.”

“Less isn’t always worse. They have developed different weapons over the years than ours. They can’t send more people to attack us because that would leave their base exposed. But they also can’t afford to leave us alone

and let us stockpile our resources. There are other sects out there as well. No one can win by doing nothing. No one can win by attacking. In the end, the only victory will come by time-shifting.”

The holographic display showed red and blue dots that represented the ships in space. The two fleets converged. Several dots disappeared in the first exchange.

“Alpha Wing is destroyed, Sir,” said the man at what must have been the communications console. “We have twenty-eight ships left, they have sixteen.”

“Excellent,” Syril approved. “Two more passes will eliminate the enemy.”

Tok ripped a headset off his head. “They’ve dropped their bombs. Incoming, directly overhead.”

Syril barely moved, staring instead at the image of the battle. The dots reconverged, and many did not emerge. Clearly, the blue images outnumbered the red ones now. “Continue to monitor the battle, Tok. The priority is to destroy the ships. The bombs are of no consequence.”

“But the lab...”

“TOK! Return to the battle.”

Tok grudgingly turned back to his console. Others around the room had stopped to observe the argument, but now returned to their positions as well. The two fleets met again, and this time, no red dots remained.

“Seventeen ships left,” Tok informed everyone.

Natashia leaned over to Torah. “We control the ships entirely from this room. There is no point in wasting lives over something as meaningless as this battle. We save ourselves and the biologicals for important missions, usually that we instigate.”

Torah listened to her with mild interest, but continue to watch the events around him. People began to rush back and forth between the various machines.

Tok stopped in front of Syril. “The bombs will impact on the surface in less than a minute.”

“Where?”

“Directly above the lab. Worse than last time.”

Syril cursed and stepped down from his chair. “Warn the lab. Have them secure everything of value.”

“Yes, sir.”

Torah glanced at Natashia. “I don’t understand. What is the purpose of this?”

Natashia paused, staring at the stranger. There was something refreshing in the way that he looked around. Maybe it was the way that he didn’t yet seem to understand the need for violence, the utter dependency that they all felt toward it. No, it was more than that. There was something

familiar about this Torah Behing. “I don’t know, Torah. You need to understand the history of the Temporal Wars.” She paused. “Perhaps there is someone here that you should speak to.”

At that moment, the bombs hit the surface. The complex shook, knocking everyone to the ground. Torah cried out in fear, and Natashaia found herself covering him like a child. The violent, thunderous shaking lasted for more than a few seconds. When it stopped, Natashaia slowly lifted herself off of him. Torah glanced over to see Cyril pulling himself back into his chair.

“Status report!” the leader demanded.

Tok and the others hurriedly looked over their equipment. “All clear. No damage to the lab.”

Syril Patrean sighed. “Another successful defense of our way of life.”

Commander Deere stormed into the room. “They knew right where to drop those bombs. A few more volleys like that and the lab will be ruined. We can’t afford...”

Syril raised one hand and silenced the Commander. “It is our turn to attack. Tomorrow, we will send Dr. Princh’s first set of biologicals on a mission that will cripple the Tre-Nets for good.”

Deere turned to Natashaia, who glanced away. The Commander’s stare then fell on Torah. “Keep him under guard and show him to his quarters. Someone is leaking information about us to the enemy. I have no intention of letting this...this...creature turn us over to the Tre-Nets or any other sect, no matter what Dr. Princh wishes.” He snapped his fingers, and the guards lifted Torah into the air and carried him to his quarters.

Natashia came to him later, and she brought someone with her. The door opened, and Torah was confronted by a man in a long, flowing, yellow robe. The man reached up and pulled his hood down around his neck. “Hello,” he said in a calm and peaceful voice. “I am Arthur Hampton. I do not belong to a sect.”

Torah nodded. “I am Torah Behing. I also do not belong to a sect.”

Natashia almost laughed at the innocence. Torah didn’t even realize the importance of what Arthur had said.

Arthur stepped forward, reaching out his hand in greeting. “I know. But you are not a part of these wars. Natashaia has explained to me how you came to be among us. Most mysterious. I would like to get to know you, Torah Behing. Perhaps together, we can find out why you are here.”

Torah nodded, and together, the three sat at the table in the room.

“You must have questions, Torah. Ask them now. I will try to answer.”

Torah glanced at Natashaia, who nodded in encouragement. “Why do they fight?” he asked.

Arthur seemed genuinely touched by the question. Such a fresh, unjudged mind. “Because they do not understand, Torah. They are trying to control something that is not within their grasp, and doing so makes them fight. It is their perception of time that is flawed. You see, ever since the Dawn of the Scientific Age, the human race has believed that it can answer all of the questions of the cosmos. And when new facts that stand in the face of our old beliefs present themselves, we open-mindedly take on those new facts and incorporate them into who we are. Think about it. Concepts of gravity, of solar systems, of circular planets, of atoms and DNA, of fusion and fission, these things all stand against the religious faiths of our ancestors, who didn’t know better.

“The problem, of course, is that we don’t really know anything either. We may understand that we have to constantly change our ideas about how things work, but there are still issues that we don’t even think to question. I work with a group of people who have begun to question the very nature of time itself, and we are doing everything in our power to enlighten others on what we believe. In essence, our role is that of peacemaker in this universe, because if everyone understood time the way that we do, there would be no need to fight each other.”

“How come?”

“Because we don’t believe that time-travel is possible in the sense that all of the sects do. They want to go back in time and change the past of their ancestors. They assume that time is linear, even though they have managed to convince themselves that people can go back in time and make dramatic changes that eliminate entire timelines. Think of it like this. There are many moments that exist. As people, we live in a dimension that organizes those moments in linear chronology. That is how we believe that we live, and we base everything about ourselves on that belief. But what if that is wrong? What if time is not about linearity at all? Then this entire war is ludicrous. To that point, each of the sects is trying to unravel the mystery of time-shifting based on the belief that they can send a person back in time so that they are victorious. Even if they could succeed, none of them would necessarily be alive in the new timeline, certainly not in the same groups, and what would have been the point? And they can justify all of this as being possible because they believe that it is not inconsistent to think that at some moment, one sect will send someone back in time, and we will likely cease to exist, and that will be that. And since each sect wants to be the one to control the new timeline, they must do enough harm to each other to survive until their scientists solve the mathematical dilemma of time travel.

“If they believed in pure linearity, they would realize that they could not do what they are talking about, because time would already have changed because someone from the future would have sent someone back

in time already, and we would know about it. That would imply that either no one figures out how to travel through time, or someone does, and the person they sent back didn't really change our existence. But no one really believes in true linearity. They believe in causality, based on the works primarily of Dr. Theodore Mobius over ten years ago. In a world without religion, or with science as our religion, people become comfortable with the notion that they can explain things in imaginary terms and numbers, as if that fuzzy logic somehow justifies not knowing exactly how it all works. But we still think that we have the answers. No one wants to accept the possibility that time doesn't operate under any set of rules that we could comprehend.

"The problem with the Scientific Age, my friend, is that while it opens our minds to possibilities and sheds light on issues that we had overlooked before, it encourages us to ignore issues of faith. But anyway that you look at it, something had to have created the forces of the universe, and it is just possible that we can never truly understand those forces, no matter how well we learn to control and live in the universe as we understand it. Does all of this make sense to you, Torah?"

Torah nodded. Somehow, it did all make sense. But how? And why?

"Who am I?" he asked.

Arthur blinked. The person before him seemed almost eloquent in his simplicity. After listening to a long soliloquy on the nature of time and the universe, he dropped back to such a personal question as "Who am I?" Arthur had to admit that he did not know.

"I don't know where you came from, how you got here, or who you belong to. But if you remain open to what I have told you, I believe that you might be of some use to my followers. We travel between the sects, trying to help them deal with these issues of faith, trying to help them understand the possibility that this entire war is unnecessary. All of the sects recognize our nonpartisanship and allow us free passage throughout their colonies. I can only imagine why it is that you ended up here at a time when I was visiting. But there must be some significance. Think tonight about what I have said. In the coming days, I will depart for the Tre-Net sect. Perhaps you will be interested in coming with me."

Torah nodded. Natasha stood and hugged the newcomer tightly. "I will find you in the morning. Sleep well, my new friend."

Arthur shook Torah's hand. "May the powers of time answer all of your questions."

The second dream was soothing. A great light swirled above him, descending into his body and touching him in a way that made him feel at peace. The feeling of drifting through air and space, like he was a part of it all, filled him. There was no other feeling like it.

Then the lights began to dance, first blue and red, then green. Forming patterns and then splintering apart, these colors danced in front of him in the vacuum of a space that he could not understand.

It ended abruptly.

Torah awoke, rose, and walked out of his room. The two guards looked surprised to see him. "Take me to Natashaia," he instructed.

Sharing a surprised look between them, the guards pointed down the hall. One led, the other trailed, and in minutes they were at the lab. It was the following day.

"Good morning," she said.

"I had a dream," he stated.

She set down an electronic pad that she was working on and brought over some of the equipment that she had used on him the day before. He took a seat, and she lined up the machine directly in front of him. Less than five minutes later, she sat back in shock.

"This is no dream," she announced.

He frowned, not understanding.

She spun a monitor around so that he could see. On the display were the colored lights from his dream. The perspective was different than the previous night, but it reminded him of something. Evidently, Natashaia saw the same thing. She picked up a small communication device.

"Commander Deere."

There was a pause, then Deere's voice was heard. "Yes, Doctor?"

"I think you should come down to my lab. Bring Syril with you."

"On our way."

She turned back to Torah. "Dreams and memories come from different locations in your brain. My machine really only monitors memories. Dreams compile themselves in an entirely different manner, based on thought fragments and your subconscious. They can also be monitored, but not by my equipment. This image that you saw is not a dream. It is a memory, but it was not here yesterday. Not that I could find, anyway. You had only a few minutes of memories when Commander Deere first brought you in here."

"What does this mean?"

"I'd like to take a blood sample before Commander Deere arrives. Is that all right, Torah?"

He nodded.

She took the test and analyzed it across the room. Her face was disappointed when she returned. "Now I am confused."

Deere and Syril stepped into the lab at that moment. "What is it, Dr. Princh?" Syril asked.

"Look at this." She replayed Torah's dream for them. They all recognized what it was immediately.

“This is the holographic battle display,” Cyril announced, although even Torah realized it.

“I don’t recall this battle,” Deere said.

“Where did you get this?” Cyril asked Natashaia.

“Torah saw it, last night.”

“He dreamt this?”

“No. Not exactly. It was programmed into his mind. He only remembered it last night.”

Deere stared at her. “Like the DeMO program.”

“Exactly. Someone wanted him to recall this image at precisely this moment in time.”

Deere was on his guard immediately. “Is he a biological?”

Natashia shook her head. “I already ran a blood test. The DNA is true human, not biological. It’s easy to tell the difference.”

Syril frowned. “Then what is going on?”

“I have no idea,” Natashaia responded.

“Let me get this straight,” Deere began. “This man appears out of nowhere, no idea who he is, no record of his birth in the data files, which include births in all of the sects. His first memories are of a battle plan that we haven’t seen yet. And you are trying to tell me that someone programmed him to remember this battle display overnight.”

Natashia nodded.

“Time-shifting,” Deere offered. “He’s from the future.”

Syril chuckled. “A time-shifted, DeMO enhanced person from the future, sent to warn us of an impending battle in which a third sect intrudes on a battle between us and the Tre-Nets.”

Natashia shrugged. “A possibility.”

“It’s preposterous.”

“Maybe we sent him back in time to warn us of a coming battle, a battle in which defeat occurred the first time, but victory would have meant our dominance in the war.”

Syril frowned at this, but when he opened his mouth to speak, the battle alarm sounded. “Tok to Cyril.”

Syril twitched his communicator. “Go ahead.”

“Sir, the Tre-Nets are attacking again.”

“On my way. Sortie the first set of ships, and keep a second fleet on stand-by.”

“Sir?”

“Just do it.” He turned to Natashaia. “Bring that equipment with you. Let’s go.”

The four of them, accompanied by the two guards, raced down the corridors to the battle room. The holographic display was active. Cyril pointed next to his chair. “Set up the equipment there. Put it at the

beginning of the battle. If you see the image on the screen match the image on the holograph, let me know.”

Natashia and Torah stood next to the monitor and reset Torah’s memory dump. The image paused, and they both moved their eyes back and forth from the screen to the large holograph in the center of the room. Syril took his seat, and Deere began to bark orders to the rest of the crew stationed at the consoles. The Tre-Net ships began to close on the Spyglass.

“Thirty seconds until contact,” Tok announced, glancing uneasily at Torah.

Torah and Natashia saw it at once. She started the memory dump in motion. “Look!” she said to Syril. Deere was at their side instantly. It was clear to everyone. The image on the screen matched the image in front of them.

“Launch a second fleet of ships,” Syril announced.

Tok looked over his shoulder, uncertain, but Syril’s commanding voice ended his hesitation. “Do it now.”

Forty more ships were sent forth from the planet’s surface. The first engagement high above began. As before, the Tre-Nets were outnumbered and suffered heavy casualties on the first exchange of gunfire.

“Incoming ships, Sir,” someone yelled. A single green blip appeared on the edge of the three-dimensional display. “It’s the Carvons.”

Syril frowned. “They’re a little bit out of their area, aren’t they? Send the second fleet in that direction.”

Natashia and Torah watched the screen and saw what was happening. Everything was playing out exactly as it had in his vision, except for the forty Spyglass ships headed to intercept the Carvon fleet. In their second pass, the Tre-Nets were eliminated. “Turn our remaining ships from the Tre-Net encounter toward the Carvon fleet,” Syril ordered.

There were only thirty Carvon ships, represented in green, on the screen. They were now outnumbered two to one. Seeing the odds that they faced, the Carvon ships began to turn away. At that point, the similarities between actual events and Torah’s vision disappeared.

“Follow them,” Syril ordered. “Hunt them down to the last ship.”

It didn’t take long. Within five minutes, the Carvon were destroyed. Cheers erupted throughout the command center. Syril patted Torah on the back. “You have saved us. I only wish I understood better who you were.”

Torah remained silent and peaceful.

It was hours later in his quarters that Natashia brought Arthur back to visit. A look of concern sat heavily on the man’s face.

“My friend, I do not pretend to fully comprehend the events that have transpired here today. It would appear that others were right in their



assumptions about the mechanics of time travel. From what Natasha has explained to me, it seems that you must have been sent back from the future to change the events of today. That being the case, there must not be any conflicts in the notion of causality. Events that cause one another, no matter in what order they occurred in linear time, do not necessarily imply the need for those events to be fixed, I think. I was wrong.”

“Then who am I?” Torah asked.

Arthur smiled. “Someone from the future. Perhaps in time, your memories will return to you. Or perhaps, they have been erased because the timeline from which they came no longer will occur. The scientists in the time labs are very comfortable with this notion. I must admit that I am not, but time, ironically, will hopefully heal my difficulties. What we still don’t know is how sending you back guaranteed that we would be victorious now. How did winning today’s battle really change the future of the war? After all, if time-shifting does become a reality, it is absolutely necessary that we now be able to win the war, or else another sect could still change the timeline again.”

Torah looked sad.

“I am sorry, my friend. I am talking about issues of philosophy when you are concerned about something so personal as who you are. Tomorrow, let us speak of nothing more than you. Let us all comfort the person that has made our victory possible.”

Natasha rose, as did Arthur. “Rest well, my young friend,” he said.

The doctor reached down and kissed him on the cheek. “I will see you in the morning. The guards will still be stationed outside your door.” With that, they left him alone, with his thoughts and two brief days of memories.

The third dream was short and real. It’s violent nature tore at his very soul. He could see the lab. Dr. Princh was wandering around, doing research, testing specimens, and talking to the computer. The door opened, and Tok stepped inside. She glanced over and nodded in his direction, then turned back to her work. Slowly, Tok pulled a weapon out of his pocket, raised it to the back of her head, and fired. Natasha collapsed in a messy pool of blood, and Tok left.

Torah awoke from this short image, quivering in his own cold sweat. With that vision, he now knew something else, though he wasn’t sure how he had gleaned this piece of information. He now knew that Natasha Princh was his mother.

He scrambled out of bed, through the door, and stumbled into the hallway. The guards snapped to attention in surprise. “Come on,” he told them.

He led them down the maze of hallways, heading toward the lab. He was panting as they turned the final corner. Far down the hall, Tok was entering the lab. “Stop him,” Torah wheezed. “He’s going to kill her.”

One guard nodded to the other, who proceeded to bolt down the hall, turning into the lab, gun outstretched. “Stop!” he shouted. A laser bolt shot past him, though he barely winced, and then he fired. Natasha screamed.

Torah and the other guard were there instantly. Tok lay dead on the ground, and a shaking Natasha leaned unevenly against a countertop. Torah ran to her side and held her close to him. “It is OK. You must scan my memories again.”

After a few moments in which she calmed herself down, she did as he requested. And she saw what he had seen: the view from the side of the room, of Tok entering and drawing his gun on her, then shooting while she worked. Her eyes grew wide as she saw her body collapse to the ground.

“This was not a dream,” she said. “It was a memory. Someone programmed you to remember this at a very specific time.”

Torah nodded. “I think you did. You are my mother.” She fell back into her chair.

Syril and Deere entered the room and heard the last sentence. “What?” Cyril asked.

Natasha grabbed a sampler and took another blood sample from Torah. Then she took another from herself.

“Natasha is my mother.”

Deere looked unamused. “She has never had children.”

“But I will,” she said. “The DNA is a match. Torah Behing is my offspring. Will be my offspring, I mean.”

Syril shook his head. “If you were supposed to die here, how would you ever have had a child in the future?”

Natasha nodded, staring incredulously at Torah, her son. “It seems that we have a paradox.”

“No you don’t,” said a voice at the door. It was Arthur Hampton.

“How is it possible that someone could come back in time to prevent his mother from being killed? He could never have been born. It is the reverse problem of going back to kill your parents,” Cyril stated.

“That is only true under commonly accepted theories of linearity and causality. But why do you assume that you understand these issues. I have been telling you for some time now that we might not have a proper framework from which to explain time.”

Deere grew angry. “Then explain it to us, Arthur.”

“Imagine life as a series of moments. Someone constructs those moments. Someone, or something. Beings that exist in a dimension far beyond our comprehension. They create the moments, and then organize

them. We live in a framework that these moments happen in a chronological order. But that doesn't mean that they really occur that way."

"I don't understand," Deere confessed, shaking his head.

"You don't have to, Commander. Accept the possibility that we don't really understand the universe. Because we don't. We may have a much better grasp of its characteristics than people did one or two thousand years ago, but that means nothing. Our science only answers questions that we are capable of asking. Perhaps in time, our questions will change, and will we operate from a different basis of fact."

"Who am I?" Torah asked.

"You are my son," Natashaia replied.

"No," Arthur cut in. "You are our glimpse, our first experience with something beyond our most basic understanding of the universe. You have been sent to us to remind us that even though we have come a long way and answered many questions, we still have a lot to learn. It would appear that you were programmed by your mother in a timeline that cannot exist to come here, save our sect from destruction, and save her from being killed before you were ever conceived."

Torah nodded.

Deere glanced at the equipment around the office. "Is this equipment something that any scientist would have to believe?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if we took his memory dump to someone outside of our sect, could they dispute whether what they were seeing was real?"

Natashia shook her head. "No. This cannot be mistaken for a program or a dream. What he saw was a memory, and my equipment cannot be disputed."

Deere glanced at Syril, then pointed at the machine. "Arthur, Natashaia, and Torah, come with me. And bring that device."

"Where are you going?" Syril asked.

"To the Tre-Nets, under a flag of truce. I want to explain to them what has happened."

Arthur smiled. "To use science to explain what must be considered a matter of faith?"

"There should be room for both in this universe," Deere said. "The fighting ends now. We must convince them that the wars are misguided."

A brief series of chronological moments later, the wars ended.