

Blink and You'll Miss It

Episode 1 Scene 1 *The Past*

I was banging my best mate's ex-wife when it happened. We, actually, *I* was about to climax when the room shook. I'd fucked my mate's ex-missus before—it was far from our first time—but it was the first time the earth moved.

Lights flickered, glasses fell, as ripples shuddered the house. Aftershocks—but we were in the middle of the continent, and earthquakes were rare. I tugged on my shorts and went upstairs. The basement was a bad place to be.

Out on the street, a dozen car alarms were screaming. One had a weird warning voice telling those nearby they were too close and to “back away.” I hated those things; they had *dickhead* written all over them.

My motorcycle and the one next to it were on their sides. The initial shock had knocked them down. I levered up my bike. It was heavy, as usual. It wasn't the first time I'd had to pick it up. I did the same for Dave's ride. He was my next-door neighbor, and he would've done the same for me. Besides, a motorbike on its side is truly a sad sight.

I looked up and down the street. People were sticking their heads out their front doors. What the hell was going on? There were the sounds of sirens in the distance; the dual cadences were a combination of fire and ambulance. I later learned that a gas line had ruptured, and a fire

was raging. The stink of smoke that later became a permanent backdrop to life on this plane of existence had yet to register.

A cop car turned into the street. The officer in the passenger's seat was on the mic, informing everyone it was "OK" and "to go inside." Most recognized this for the bullshit it was and stayed outside. The cops that day were ill-informed and useless. This was a sign of times to come. It wasn't the cops' fault. They hadn't been trained for the events to follow. I know. Back then I was a cop, too.

Episode 1 Scene 2

The Present

My Keeper motorbike has more dings on it since I left the Deacons' tender care. So have I. It's unavoidable. Law and order in the traditional sense has disappeared. People look after themselves and those close to them. Society has regressed and returned to its tribal roots. In my opinion, that'd been happening for a while. The Blink just served to speed things up. The Blink also made it more feral; the law of the jungle, dog-eat-dog, whatever you want to call it, Darwin was mostly right. The fittest do survive, but only if they have luck on their side.

I'm back in Saskatoon and, judging by the signage, back when this crap storm all began. This is The Blink's epicenter, and I end up in this time and place more than anywhere else. Bad karma, I guess.

The signs of protest along the edges of the fortified compounds still sing the same tune: "Man Is Not God," "Leave Nature to Nature." The God-botherers and the greenies were hand in hand over this one. Their protests against science and the unknown outcomes of people tampering with the environment had fallen on deaf ears. Progress was king, and humanity had

the keys to the castle. The only problem was, the religious kooks and earth lovers were right. We had the keys. Only they weren't to a castle. They were to Pandora's box. And we opened it.

I shake my head to clear my thoughts. Transtemporal shifts have a way of messing with your brain. I look down at the gauges on my ride. They're familiar to me. This isn't always the case. In certain times and places, the bike's almost alien, but right now, one thing's clear: a light's winking. I'm almost empty. Time to fill up.

I pull down my visor, and the heads-up display clicks in. There's a broad, overall map of the city. Fuel depots are indicated in a pulsing red. Not as many as I remember; the time shifts must be hurting supply. The large, blank space to the north of the city is still there. It'll never move. This is where the university was. This is where the trouble began. The Blink started here.

Episode 1 Scene 3

The Past

The days following the quake appeared normal in Saskatoon. Sure, the power was erratic, and things broke down more, but this wasn't unusual. Life proceeded as it always did in the summer. Roads were repaired, people had barbecues, and everything was good.

Then the situation began to change. Slowly but surely, weird shit started occurring. Stuff disappeared, pets mainly. People were concerned. They called the cops, we responded. We acted concerned, but it was animals we were talking about here. Cops had priorities, and our four-legged companions didn't rate highly. If you wanted to get your pussy out of a tree, call the fucking fire department.

A short time later, homeless people became an issue. They disappeared too. Well-known regulars downtown could no longer be found. No one knew where they'd gone. Their

disappearance concerned the charities and church groups. The city fathers turned a blind eye. This wasn't something they worried about. The city mothers didn't give a shit, either.

It was only when strangers started showing up that Joe Citizen paid attention. These new strangers were recognizably human, yet they acted in ways that were different. It was subtle, but they just didn't fit in. They were out of time, out of their own time.

Eventually, the cops noticed the changes as well. These unfamiliar homeless people knew things and carried items that were just wrong. They had diseases that had supposedly been eradicated or, more worryingly, diseases that were completely resistant to the most up-to-date medicinal drugs. People, modern-day people or, more accurately, current-day people, responded in the most typical way possible; they turned inward. Family, neighborhood, religion, community—whatever grouping felt safest—these were the alliances people formed.

We, the cops, were neutral. At first. We were the front line. We put out the fires. The citizens were our responsibility. Everything else might be falling apart, but you could rely on the police. We tried to keep the peace. Times, however, were changing. The situation inside the police force was also changing. We were no longer unified. Our weapons and training couldn't cope with the increasing number and groups of interlopers, groups like the War Clans and the Scythers. Shit was happening that we didn't understand, and the higher-ups weren't helping.

The overall response was predictable. Those with money and power, which most definitely included our bosses, dug in. They formed the first of the truly weaponized enclaves. They had the big guns and the equipment. A lot of the cop force went with them, and who could blame them? The enclaves had the firepower, and they needed grunts to man the weapons. It was a good fit. Some of them survived. Some didn't. No one cared either way. They were pricks.

The remainder of the force stayed in the community. We weren't saints, but the citizens deserved better than having the cops completely abandon them. Too bad we were next to useless, outmuscled by the past and outgunned by the future. The writing on the wall was so big, you could read it from space. We had to change.

After the initial skirmishes, one thing became clear. The world as we knew it was different. Not completely changed but changed enough. Time was blended, and it was up to us to adapt or die. And, in the beginning, it was mainly about dying.

Episode 1 Scene 4 *The Present*

I approach the fuel depot with caution. If you've operated a depot through The Blink event and survived, you know what you're doing. It also means you have contacts, contacts through time and space. If you have these, then you know what I am. And if you know that, it's you who should be cautious.

A gun turret sways its way across the thick compound wall. Its beady red eye flares, and twin targeting spots appear on my chest. Standard protocol. Good protocol. I'm not overly impressed, but it's good to see their operational capability. I'm identified.

"What do you want, Keeper?" growls a harsh, metallic voice.

It isn't a question; it's a challenge. The individual at the other end of the gun-rig is probably a kid, a teenager most likely. They take their responsibilities seriously.

It was the kids who adapted the fastest to the crap that happened in the aftermath of The Blink. They have the gaming and tech skills to operate this quasi-future-weapons shit. However, their greatest asset to the community is a tendency to shoot first and ask questions later. The adults value this clarity and effortless decision-making. The lack of conscience that goes along

with this is of occasional concern. But those problems can be dealt with later. Survival now is the key.

“Fuel. Scan me,” I answer.

I’ve already turned off my motorbike’s overdeveloped survival mechanism. Scanning my ride or me without the primary defenses shut down automatically results in a crater the size of a basketball court appearing at the source of the scan. Everyone knows this. The Keepers make sure of it.

The gun barrel droops like an old man’s erection, and a white light blinks on. The light dances across the bar code embedded in my body armor. There’s a pause—again, protocol—and then the heavy outer gate slides open. Bar code accepted. It’s the smart choice. If the right choice hadn’t been made, I would’ve blown a hole right through the front gate. I have my own form of protocol.

I notch the heavy bike into gear, and it burbles forward. The motorbike’s a beast: a semiautonomous piece of machinery that’s designed to blend in with whatever era we cascade into. At the moment, it’s an over-engineered, black muscle bike. I love it.

In other eras, it takes on different forms; it even turned into a bizarre bio horse when I had to deal with a pack of marauding Mongols down the line. It fooled no one. Everyone knew I was a Keeper, but the bike changed anyway. It’s part of the rules.

The makers of these killing platforms, the Deacons, insist that our level of weaponry be only one or two generations ahead of the time in which we find ourselves. The idea is to preserve parity in terms of weapons capability. If I go down, the Deacons don’t want advanced tech introduced into the wrong time. This works fine when going back in time, but it’s a bitch moving

forward. Much beyond the 26th century, and I need to have my partner with me, or I'd get smoked.

I tweak the throttle, and the bike rolls through the outer gate and into the interior kill zone. Any well-established fuel depot has a primary kill zone between the inner and outer gates. This one's seen recent use. The shiny scars on the inside walls indicate that one of the trigger-happy teenagers had let loose when confronted with a problem too complex to comprehend. I bet the kid's parents are proud.

I swing my leg over the bike and stretch. Transtemporal travel, or cascading, as it's commonly called, not only gives your head a tweak, it also plays hell with the spine. That, and I really want a drink, like right now. I stride up to the inner door and bang on the outside with my ultra-enamel glove. It rings loud off the steel.

"Hold your damn horses, Keeper," swears an older voice. "You're inside. You'll get a drink soon enough."

I smile. My reputation precedes me.

Episode 1 Scene 5 *The Past*

The federal government was, as usual, slow to respond. The enclaves and their publicly paid-for arms and personnel were seen as a solution to the ever-increasing problem of time raids. It was cities and local authorities taking charge; they stepped up and took care of the citizenry. The feds mouthed words about concerning themselves with the big picture and, to be fair, they eventually did provide a lagging strategy to match the local tactics.

Their strategies didn't work. No one, least of all our elected officials, had a clue about what was really going on. I'd love to blame them—point the finger and tell them they'd dropped

the ball. But I'd be wrong. They couldn't drop the ball; they didn't even know what game they were playing.

The War Clans were the first to arrive. They weren't called that then, but that's what they became known as. The War Clans showed up in numbers, big numbers, but not vast numbers, and they came from the past. And like many things from the past, we completely underestimated them.

A number of gun-rich communities in the United States and Canada could deal with the Clans straight up. So could the larger towns and cities with a stable police force or military presence. North Korea and segments of the Middle East were also well-equipped for this type of engagement—years of war and isolation providing them with the necessary survival skills.

Other areas throughout the world, rural areas that had been peaceful for years, got hit hard. The War Clans had simple tactics: overwhelm a community with numbers, kill all the men and boys, grab whatever tech they could find, and wait for a time shift to take them back to their own era.

Early on, the first part of this strategy nearly always worked. The last bit, the time-shift bit, was completely random. More often than not, the War Clans' bloodlust and ferocity ran out of communities to prey upon. They weren't used to the vast distances between rural outposts, and they were smart enough to leave large towns and cities alone. They also couldn't get a grip on rudimentary transport. Anything with four wheels was technologically beyond them, so medium- to long-distance transport was out. The result? A ragtag demi-army of people out of time and place, waiting for a time shift they had no control over. What happened next? Absolute carnage.

The people of Texas got particularly pissed at the interlopers. They were the first to respond. The first to say “To hell with the federal government.” No one was surprised. They had the attitude. They had the guns.

Once news of a stalled War Clan rampage became known, posses formed and the result was predictable: a reckoning. It was a slaughter. The Clans had the numbers, but the posses had the weapons. The federal government wanted to negotiate, to gain information. Texas wasn’t interested. The War Clans weren’t interested. The Clans didn’t even understand the concept of negotiations. The posses solved this problem through controlled, precision violence. The War Clans didn’t stand a chance; they were mowed down by the hundreds. This changed later as they gained access to pilfered tech but, in the beginning, it was all about the bodies, thousands of dead bodies.

It was during this time that communities started to organize. They needed numbers, guns, and a plan. Countries started to split into smaller, more responsive sizes. Big enough to be tough to prey upon, but small enough to maneuver, should that be the need. People were still nominally part of a nation but, in reality, loyalties were more focused and local. This worked well for a while. It worked against the ruthless straight-line tactics of the War Clans. But it was far less effective against the Scythers.

Episode 1 Scene 6

The Present

The inner gate screeches open, and a forty-something-year-old face peers out. I remove my helmet. Some people think this makes Keepers look more human and less threatening. In my case, that rarely works: an intricate pattern of thick purple scarring sees to that. The man doesn’t

look shocked. Perhaps I've dealt with him before. Fuel depots are not immune to time shifts, and they are as likely as any other grouping to be cascaded into the past or future.

"You'll get your fuel, Keeper," states the man. "And then you'll be on your way."

"Fuel and information," I counter.

The man shrugs and pulls the interior gate further open. It's a show. He knows it, and I know it. In this era, a Keeper can take down anything short of a main battle camp, but egos need to be maintained. This, at least, is one trait consistent in humans throughout time.

I turn sideways and squeeze through the opening; it's not a narrow opening, but my exo-armor makes it necessary. My shoulder-mounted threat tubes, my primary-weapons source, make it tight as well. I'm not sure what ammo I currently have in the tubes, but I know it's guaranteed to make a big hole in pretty much anything. My exo-armor, like my ride, adapts to the era I'm in.

"Mikey," says the forty-year-old to the rig-rat climbing down from the gun turret. "Fuel the Keeper's vehicle and don't touch anything."

The rig-rat scowls and tosses her hair.

"Who died and made you chief asshole, Dwayne?"

Dwayne says nothing. He's heard this routine before. Besides, it's not for his benefit. It's for mine. The human ego at work again. But the name twigs a memory. Dwayne, we've met before, or rather we've met in the future.

"What happened to your old man?" I ask.

Dwayne was younger in the future, and his dad was in charge.

"Dead. Scythens."

I grunt in acknowledgment. Scythers are an occupational hazard, and a rough one at that, though they usually leave the depots alone. But they're the reason I'm here. I've been tracking one across time and space, and it's been elusive.

"Too bad. You in charge now?"

"Pretty much, though Mikey likes to think different."

We look back through the door. Mikey's walking around my ride. Her mouth's slightly open as she examines the features that make up this version of the bike. She's being careful not to touch anything.

"She yours?" I ask of Mikey's parentage.

"That's what her mother told me," answers Dwayne. "And she's good on the gun-rig."

This is about the highest compliment a parent can pay a child in a fuel depot. It's good to see family values being maintained.

Enough of the small talk. "What do you have to drink?"

Dwayne laughs. He looks through the door at Mikey. She's stopped her walk around and is now pouring a clear, foul-smelling liquid into the tank of my vehicle.

"You and your machine will be drinking together," he responds. "If that works for you."

It's my turn to laugh. It's not the first time I've drunk the same stuff that's fueling my bike.

"Yeah. That works fine."

We head to one of the compound's back rooms. My n-comm—neural communications package—tells me my bike's full and at rest. The damn thing takes on anything as fuel, though its preferences run to alcohol/ethanol-based concoctions. I guess that's why we make such a great team.

We grab a seat in what passes for a common room. Mikey comes in and takes on the bartending duties. Her 'tude has notched down by roughly one percent. I think she likes me, but it's probably the bike. The vehicle has that effect on rig-rats. Dwayne and I now have chipped glasses of syrupy fluid in front of us. It stinks.

"Bottoms up," he encourages and takes a swift shot.

He manages to stay on his seat and conscious, so I guess it's all right. I take a drink. Whoa! At least it's ethanol based; the bike will be happy. Some of the future booze I've tried contains chemical elements that don't currently exist on our periodic table. And that stuff hurts the morning after.

"You an original?" I ask.

"Close enough, though it's hard to tell exactly."

Originals are those folks based roughly in the time and place they were born and raised. They may have cascaded here and there, but the system has a habit of dropping people back where they belong. It's far from consistent and no guarantee of permanency, but while Dwayne's here, he considers himself at home.

"I saw you before, you and your pa, what, in 2040?"

"Yep, around then, before the Scyther got him."

"It attacked the depot?" I ask, surprised.

Depots are a necessity for anything that's transport based. War Clans don't care about preserving depots and are more than happy to have a crack at a fuel compound. The tech benefits from taking one down make it worthwhile for them. Anything that relies on high-level tech, and this includes the Scythers, tends to leave them alone. You got no fuel for your ride, you're in deep shit. I don't care where you come from.

“Yep, two of them attacked. Mikey here got one, the other got my dad,” he explains.

“Then we got cascaded away. Lucky timing, I guess.”

I look across at the kid. She’s pretending not to listen. I’m impressed. Taking down a Scyther’s a chore, a real goddamned chore. Scythers keep on coming until they, well, until they don’t. The Terminator’s a shirking 14-year-old virgin compared to a Scyther. The kid may be worth keeping an eye on. The Deacons, my bosses, are always looking for the next generation of Keepers. She may be a candidate. I take another drink. It rips me a new trachea. Smooth, really smooth. The kid also may help explain something.

“You only do fuel?” I ask.

“Yep, up and down the line, nothing too far away.”

Interesting. Dwayne’s referring to his sources. Fuel scarcity’s a common problem for all the tech-based operators. Pulling in fuel from the past and the future is one way to overcome this. I don’t know the details, but those in charge of depots have contacts and connections “up and down the line,” as Dwayne put it.

“You two the only ones here?” I ask.

“A couple of others. They work the shops. Keep the machines rolling.”

Mechanics and techies, critical, but not worth the time for a pair of Scythers.

“So just you and Mikey.”

He nods. Bingo. Dwayne’s too old for the Scythers to be interested. It’s got to be the kid. Mikey’s the target.

“How long’s she been working the rig?”

Her taking out a Scyther with the gun turret’s impressive. She must’ve been at it for a while.

“Since her brother left.”

“Left?”

You don’t really leave fuel depots; it’s too dangerous. You get born, you live and you die—all in the same place, though not necessarily in the same time.

“Yeah, left. Fuck you, man. You Keepers took him. He’s one of you now. They tell you nothing.”

My face is impassive. Christ, Deacons. They tell you jack shit and expect you to get the job done. I’ve been tracking a rogue Scyther for weeks, trying to work out its pattern. It’s been harassing fuel depots, and all the time it’s probably been after this kid. Shit, this is my real mission. Mikey’s slated to be one of us. Mikey’s going to be a Keeper. Assuming I can keep her alive.

Episode 1 Scene 7

The Past

After the initial onslaught, mankind battled the War Clans to a draw. The death toll was still stupendous, but it was now more equally spread. Current-day humanity called on their inner beasts, and they were just as happy as the War Clans to go on a massacre. Civilization, as most knew, was only ever a convenient pretense.

The War Clans, too, had grown more aware. Their grunt tactics of taking everything head-on had evolved into guerilla-based warfare. Competition was wonderful for forcing adaptations in killing strategies.

Then things changed again.

The first change was obvious. Communities started disappearing. It wasn't just people that disappeared. It was everything they had with them: transportation, homes, weapons, you name it, it went. There was nothing left behind.

The first time this happened, people thought the War Clans had found a new weapon, something that completely eradicated any trace of a target community. But this didn't make sense. The War Clans were after tech. Tech to take back to their own era to protect themselves from attacks in the past. They didn't want to wipe everything out.

The question was, where did this ability come from? We certainly didn't develop it. So who the hell could make whole groups vanish?

At the same time current-day communities started to vanish, attacks from the Clans ceased. They didn't just slowly disappear; they completely dried up. One day there were rampaging hordes of Vikings or Mongols or Huns knocking down your door, and the next day there was nothing. It didn't make sense. Whole communities were disappearing, but they weren't being attacked—not in the conventional sense.

Not long after the second change occurred, attacks resumed. Outlying communities were the first victims. These groups, while small, were impressively defended. That's how they survived. Most relied on a natural barrier—a river, a cliff, a valley—as an initial form of protection, and then they armed themselves to the teeth.

They'd been successful against the Clans because they'd used these natural barriers to channel their opponents' superior numbers into a relatively small area. It was then just a matter of applying overwhelming firepower and waiting for the body count to stack up. After that, the Clans left them alone.

But then these groups started getting hit again. No one knew who was causing the damage. Attacks occurred in the full light of day, or in the dead of night. Some community members reported seeing a pale fast-moving vehicle—only one—and then something would be destroyed.

Sometimes buildings would blow up; sometimes they'd burn. On other occasions, they'd just vibrate and shake until they imploded. These attackers became known as Scythers. They'd sweep in, slice away at the edge of a community, and then vanish.

What they wanted was anybody's guess. It wasn't tech. They had tech all over us at that stage. And it wasn't resources—they never took anything. So what the hell did they want?

Episode 1 Scene 8 *The Present*

“Mikey, right?”

It's an obvious statement. Dwayne's the only other person here. She shoots me a contemptuous look. I've never been any good with anything under eighteen.

“So,” I continue. “What's that short for—Michelle?”

And there I go, off to a red-hot start. The one-percent coolness factor I may have gotten, courtesy of the bike, has gone the way of my drink. Dwayne looks at me, shakes his head and heads to the workshop. He doesn't need to watch a grown Keeper make an ass of himself.

“What the hell do you want, Teen?” she demands.

There it is. The contempt's complete, and in record time. Teen's short for Temporal Enforcement Officer, the official title for a Keeper. It's usually graffitied on whatever surface has managed to survive unscathed. But for the young and feisty, it can be incorporated into everyday speech. Great.

I feel the stirring of laughter in my mind; the n-comm connection to my bike appears to be in superb working order, and my ride is appreciating my predicament. Sometimes I wish it wasn't so smart.

Mikey takes time and studies me more closely. My facial scars, or rather facial gouges, are the result of a pre-Keeper fracas with a Scyther. It was this that got me noticed by the Deacons. Taking down a Scyther with the help of your Keeper bike is considered good form. Taking one down with no training and a knife is considered awesome. I remember this. This is good. I'm awesome.

"What's your brother's name? Maybe I know him," I try.

"How would you know him? He could be anywhere."

"If he trained as a Keeper, I can find him. I can put you in contact."

She snorts and looks away, but doesn't leave. "How can you find him?"

I smile. "He'll be looking after us. He'll be protecting our timeline."

Young Mikey's puzzled. This, at least, is something she doesn't know.

"What do you mean?"

"If he survived training, he'll be working up and down the line. Looking after our people. Our timeline."

"So you don't just work here, in this time?"

"Keepers of this era protect the people of this era. Wherever they are."

"Past and future?"

"Past and future," I confirm. "I cascade around to protect our people."

Mikey's thoughtful. This is more information than she normally has to process. Working the gun-rig doesn't leave much time for contemplation—it's usually shoot or don't shoot. Or more accurately, just shoot. Thinking beyond the now is not a useful survival skill.

"So why do you do it? Why protect us?" she asks.

I've never thought about this. But I know the answer. I jerk my thumb in the direction of my motorbike.

"I get to ride that and blow shit up," I tell her.

She shrugs. The answer seems to satisfy her. She really is Keeper material.

Episode 1 Scene 9 *The Past*

As the War Clans continued their merry, marauding ways, and as humanity began to dig in and fight back, the need for a coherent cop force became redundant. We were protecting the broader community, looking after everyone. It's what we were trained for. This became less relevant as time went by. People no longer walked the streets. Instead, they hunkered down in enclaves, compounds, depots, or whatever offered the most protection.

We, the cops, were left on the outside. It's not that we didn't belong. Actually, fuck it, we didn't belong. Years, if not decades, of abusing public trust had caught up with us. Those traffic tickets we issued when not necessary, those drunks we slung in the tank when we could have dropped them off at home, those times when it was easier to be a prick behind reflective sunglasses than it was to help a citizen out; well, it was payback time.

The people didn't outright reject us, but we were definitely not welcomed. If there was a crisis, sure, they'd let us step in and help. Then once the crisis was solved, it was "See you later; close the door on your way out." The cops began to notice this. Beneath our thick layer of

insensitivity and dickness beat the heart of a former human being. We talked about organizing ourselves, building our own community, but guess what? It turns out we couldn't stand ourselves, either.

The upshot of this was the development of a mercenary class of former law enforcement officers, modern-day ronin, the samurai without a leader. And it worked. Most of us passed ourselves off as ex-military. The army had a far more positive reputation than the cops, and many of us had served previously. It wasn't a huge jump. The Blink had also resulted in the federal government releasing large caches of arms throughout the country, so obtaining weaponry wasn't a big issue. As lifestyles went, well, if you kept moving and you helped people out, they'd feed and shelter you.

I'd been doing this for years, sometimes with a partner or small crew, sometimes without. To be honest, backup wasn't always a necessity. If an enclave was having problems with the Clans, it was more about organization than outright numbers or weaponry. The average citizen alive at this time was more than capable with a range of arms. They had to be, or they'd already be dead. What they didn't have were the tactical skills. This was something I could provide.

I had a relatively comfortable existence. I'd roam the countryside looking for groups in trouble and offer to help. These small groups were of critical importance to humanity. They provided the food. These good folk were the farmers, the fishers, the people of the land. In return for feeding the cities, they received regular airdrops of guns and ammo from the feds. This was the strategy the government had come up with. Keep the farmers armed, keep the farmers alive, and keep the food coming.

The community I'd approached at this time had been on the receiving end of two nasty Clan skirmishes. The Clans at this stage were less front-on and more tactical. They'd been

getting their asses kicked when adopting the full frontal charge, so their approach now was to send in a smaller group and see what the defenses were like. Sound thinking. It was at this stage I turned up.

The group in question was happy to see me. *Happy* being a relative term in those warlike days. I sat down with the elders. They said to go talk to the kids. This was normal. The agricultural skills lay with the elders, that being anyone over thirty. Defense was handled by anyone younger. I sat down with the warriors—they hated being called *kids*—and hashed out a plan. It was a solid plan; everyone was on the same page, and so we waited.

We didn't wait long. The War Clans moved quickly, once they had the defensive weaknesses mapped out. There were no committees in War Clans, no paperwork, and definitely no double-checking with the bosses upstairs. Clean, clear lines of communication. I was jealous.

The bulk of the Clan massed at the head of the valley. It was an obvious move. They knew it, we knew it, so there was something else going on. I grabbed a pair of binoculars and checked out the throng of warriors. Oh, shit. They looked like Goths. These guys were always a handful, well organized and well led.

I signaled our defensive leader to check out the high points, to see what our watchers above could see. But the watchers were already racing back to the compound. And right behind them was a pack of Goths. This was bad.

We laid down covering fire to get the watchers back in. That worked, at least. But it was having minimal impact on the screaming masses running at us from two directions. To our group's credit, they didn't panic. They mechanically fired, reloaded, fired, until the barrels of their weapons were too hot. They then picked up the next weapon and repeated. The Goths were

paying a heavy price for this attack. But the Goths were going to win. I'd never seen such a huge Clan before.

I looked around at the young warriors defending their homestead. They were calm and determined. But it wasn't making a scrap of difference. They say there are no atheists in foxholes, but looking at this lot, I'd disagree. They were living for the here and now—there wasn't a lot of praying going on.

The Goths stormed across the flat kill zone encircling the compound. The chatter of the heavy .50-caliber machine gun opened up. Swaths of Goth warriors were mowed down, but momentum's a bitch, and those bastards just kept on coming.

The combined packs hit the wall of the compound from two sides—beautiful tactical coordination. We were stretched thin, and we were as good as dead; those walls would only last a minute. The walls creaked and groaned under the weight of Goth warriors. We formed a defensive circle in the center of the compound and kept on firing. It wasn't going to be enough. There was no way we were going to survive this.

Then the Clan vanished.

Episode 1 Scene 10 *The Present*

I move into the workshop. Dwayne is elbow-deep in a large projectile weapon. Cases of ammo are stacked up behind him. They're probably a match for the gun turret out front, but maybe not. Fuel depots are strange places, a cross between past, present, and future, and those in charge collect anything they deem valuable.

A medium-size communication device warbles and glows alternately green and red next to the ammo. My bike pricks up at this and gives my brain a tweak. It's an intertemporal

communicator. A critical piece of equipment for any depot. I pretend not to notice it. Dwayne ignores my pretenses.

“It is what it is, Keeper. Don’t sweat it,” he tells me.

I shake my head. I know what it is. An intertemporal communicator, an ITC, is at the heart of any Keeper’s motorbike. It’s how we communicate with home base. It’s the basis for our time travel. For this to be here means a vehicle’s been destroyed. If a vehicle’s destroyed, most likely a Keeper is dead.

Every fuel depot has an ITC, but they are reluctant to say where they get them. They use them to hunt down fuel supplies in the near past and future. By rights, I should commandeer this one and take it back to the Deacons. But if I did that, I’d be stupid. Where would the fuel come from then? No fuel means no ride. And a walking Keeper’s a dead Keeper.

“We need to talk,” I say.

“Mikey?” he guesses.

“Yep. Mikey.”

“You taking her, too? You taking my other kid?” he sighs. “You Keepers are a bunch of pricks.”

“Kids like Mikey, they’re the future.”

It’s the standard reply and I get the standard response.

“Who’s future? I’ve been to the future. And guess what? It ain’t that fucking great.”

The man has a point. The Deacons are supposedly protecting us and guiding us to a rosy paradise. A place where people live in peace, and there’s hot and cold running water on demand. I’ve been to this place. It’s called the past. And this particular past doesn’t exist anymore. The Blink kicked us off that particular timeline. A whole species voted off the island.

“She’ll be safer,” I counter.

“From the Scyther?”

Papa Dwayne isn’t stupid. He knows something’s up. A Scyther chasing a fuel depot through time; well, it’s not after the tech.

I nod. “She must be something special.”

“Did you come for her? Specifically for her?”

I shake my head. It’s warm in the shop, and I can feel my scars glowing.

“Nope. I was chasing a Scyther. Probably the same one that killed your dad.”

“They didn’t tell you about Mikey.”

Truth time. “No, Dwayne, they didn’t. I just worked it out.”

He gives a bitter laugh. “Christ, interdimensional time travel and the people in charge still don’t give the boots on the ground the full story.”

“I can see where she gets her brains.”

He doesn’t smile and instead sighs. “She’s a great rig-rat.”

He knows the story. Having a Scyther chasing you through time and space only ends one way. The Keepers offer Mikey a chance. If she gets trained up, she’ll be on equal footing.

“At least let me have a drink with her before you haul her off.”

I nod. I can respect that.

Episode 1 Scene 11

The Past

When the dust had settled—and there was plenty of it from the Goth charge—we took a look around. Our attackers had vanished, completely vanished. There wasn’t a single sign of them.

Sure, the walls were damaged, but other than that, there was no indication that we'd just about been on the business end of a massacre.

We exited the compound and headed into the kill zone. There should've been dozens of dead bodies. A .50-caliber machine gun doesn't do nice. It alone should've taken care of that many. But there was nothing. Instead, all we found was a heavy sprinkling of slugs in the area the bodies had fallen. The slugs were malformed and twisted, the result of caroming off Goth bone and armor, but there was nothing else, not even blood.

We sent heavily armed watchers to the top of the nearby hills. Their reports came back negative: nothing to be seen. Everything was wrong. Humanity had long grown used to the concept of fighting other groups of humans from completely different time periods. It was part of the background noise of day-to-day living. It was a little worse than having to put up with rush-hour traffic, but probably better than having to watch daytime TV. It was normal. But large groups of people simply disappearing, well, that was something else altogether.

We stood around, stunned. People began to look at me, not strangely, but with a certain amount of respect. I was the only difference in this group; therefore, I must've had something to do with the Goths' disappearance. Then the community got back to business. Those with agricultural skills got their tools and equipment while the warriors made sure their weapons were clean and loaded. Then both groups headed out into the fields, each farmer with an armed escort, as if nothing had happened.

I returned to the compound; my work here was done. I gathered up my gear and went over to my beat-up old motorbike. It was dirty and dusty and could've done with an oil change, but it ran OK. I was about to kick-start the machine when an elder approached me. She placed her hand on my arm and asked me to stay for the evening. I looked up at the sky. I was

somewhere near the old Canadian/American border and it was summer. I still had light left in the evening, but I'd no real place to go. So I stayed.

And I continued to stay. I later learned the elders and the warriors had had a vote. They wanted to keep me around for a while. Their pragmatic side told them it was handy to have someone to organize their defenses, to teach the kids how to deal with attacks. Their less-pragmatic side told them I was a good luck charm. Religion had long since been put on the back burner: the various Good Books had no explanation for what was happening to us, but superstition hadn't gone anywhere.

The next airdrop of weapons provided more information. Our situation wasn't unique. The War Clans had disappeared. There'd been no reports of attacks for weeks. People looked at me with less respect. I wasn't a good luck charm. It was happening everywhere. I'd just turned into a useless mouth to feed. Time to boogie.

My bedroll and gear were still packed up. I grabbed them and walked out to my ride. I'd scrounged oil from the airdrop and, once I'd dealt with that, I'd be on my way. I'd got my bike up on the main stand and was waiting for the oil to drain when Leon turned up.

Leon was fuming. He was the eldest of the warriors and therefore in charge of defenses. He didn't want me to leave; he thought I had more to offer. Leon was also moving on. After the next harvest, he would move into the agricultural grouping to reap food instead of people. He wanted his successor to be fully trained so his own ass would be protected. I liked Leon. He was practical. He stood in front of me, hands on hips. He opened his mouth to persuade me to stay, and then all hell broke loose.

Episode 1 Scene 12
The Present

I'm sitting out front of the fuel depot; my bike's rumbling between my legs. One of the mechanics has gun-turret duty. He's clearly familiar with the gun-rig, but he doesn't look happy—he's too old. Slower reflexes and a conscience are a hindrance. No doubt the rig-rat's inside saying good-bye to Papa, having a drink, maybe shedding a tear.

The outer door of the compound squeals open, and Mikey rides out. No evidence of tears. She originally wanted to ride two-up on the back of my beast. Not a good idea. Unless you're gene coded into the bike's system, you'll get fried, slowly fried at that—my ride thinks this is funny. However, my ride, like me, doesn't think what Mikey is riding is funny.

“What the hell do you call that?” I ask.

The machine she's sitting on has four wheels and a sidecar. It's a mechanical nightmare.

“What do I call what?” she says, folding her arms across her chest.

“I mean what the hell is it?”

“It's an ATV with a sidecar, old-timer. Never seen one before?”

Good Christ. What a mess. The original machine looks like a standard four-wheel all-terrain vehicle with big multipurpose tires and a large, comfortable seat. But attached is a modified sidecar that someone's torn from the side of a World War II-era motorcycle. The vehicle has five wheels. How the hell does it go around corners?

“Does it go? We've got a long ride.”

She twists the throttle. The ATV roars. Holy shit, that sounds good. I'm impressed. But I don't tell her. She clambers off the bike and pulls back the sidecar's tonneau cover. I get a magician's sweep of the arm.

“Look at this.”

I peer into the sidecar: fuel, weapons, and food. That's one nice set of priorities. Again, I'm impressed. Again, I don't tell her. She pulls up the cover and climbs back on her ride. Now that I've seen her set-up, I'm marginally happier.

"You say good-bye to Dwayne?"

She nods and says nothing.

"Let's get going. Sooner we start, the sooner we finish," I order.

She gives a sarcastic laugh. "Oh boy, that's a gem of advice."

Told you I was no good with kids. I could hear the guy in the gun turret laughing. This is just great.

"Put your helmet on. Let's make tracks."

"Wait," she says. "What do I call you?"

"What?"

"What do I call you?" she repeats. "I can't call you Keeper all the time."

I think about this. It's a long ride to where we're going. There are going to be problems along the way. And she's only a teenager. Decision made. Easy.

"Keeper sounds just fine to me."

Episode 1 Scene 13 *The Past*

The piece of shrapnel that sliced through my cheek hurt. They say chicks dig scars, but no one was going to dig Leon's scar. The same wedge of metal that gouged past me ripped a large chunk out of his throat. Not large enough to kill him instantly, but definitely large enough to kill him. I've seen a lot of people die; and watching someone's throat foam with blood and bubbles is no fun at all. I'm guessing it wasn't pleasant for Leon, either.

I staggered out from behind the bike and surveyed the scene. Oily smoke was pouring out of the generator building and billowing out the front of the compound. People had already formed a bucket chain and were dealing with the flames. They knew what they were doing; there was a sense of controlled urgency but no panic. But something didn't feel right. Generators don't simply blow up on their own.

I retrieved the binoculars from my saddlebag and scanned the ridgeline above the compound. They always had a watcher up there, keeping an eye out for the War Clans. Nothing had been seen for weeks, but no one was slacking off. I twisted the dial and got the watcher into clear focus. She was jumping up and down and vigorously waving toward the front of the compound, out beyond where the generator was burning.

I was about to swing the binoculars around to focus on what she was pointing at when her head exploded. One second she was a human semaphore, and the next there was a crimson bloom of blood and bone. What the hell had done that? There was no echo of gunshot. No nothing. I might've missed it above the crackling of the burning generator, but I didn't think so. Something was definitely not right.

The next explosion was as big as the first and took out the grain storage shed. Smoldering red-hot wheat was flung through the air, setting fire to any flammable surfaces. My travel gear protected me from most of it, but the others weren't as lucky. The bucket chain disintegrated as people started rolling on the ground to douse their burning clothes. Something was seriously wrong.

I ran along the side of the still-burning generator shed and moved down the compound wall. I considered scrambling up the watchtower, but sanity prevailed. Something was taking precise shots at the compound, and I didn't want to become another victim.

A small set of stairs led to an earthen ramp behind the wall. I climbed these and popped my head up to take a look. Something glinted in the sun: it looked small and far off. I risked the binoculars. What the hell was that?

The vehicle was low and sleek, a future interpretation of a motorbike maybe. There was a figure standing off to the right of the vehicle. It was dressed in an off-white garment that rippled in the still air. The figure lifted a device to its face and looked directly at me. How could I be sure of this? Because it fucking waved at me. The figure lowered the device and studied its surface. Then with a long finger, it pressed something. I know a targeting mechanism when I see one, and I'd just become the target. I got the hell out of Dodge.

Episode 1 Scene 14 *The Past*

When I came to, it was night. I'd no idea how long I'd been out, but it must've been a while. The constellations in the night sky were crystal clear, not a hint of sun anywhere. I sat up and almost threw up. My head was pounding, and I could feel sticky blood matted in the hair at the back of my head. I didn't touch it; I didn't want to know how badly I was injured. An ounce of denial was always worth a pound of reality. A woman came over to me. I recognized her. This was a good sign: at least my brain wasn't completely wrecked.

The woman, one of the agricultural elders, looked worried, and rightly so. At ground level, the smoldering glow of the buildings provided enough light to see the damage. And the stink of smoke brought back to me what had happened. What the hell had attacked us? The elder told me nothing and instead grabbed me by the arm and guided me to the communal hut. Inside were the rest of the elders, and they looked grim.

I sat down and someone gave me a drink. It was the local version of alcohol, a rough moonshine. It tasted great. I coughed my appreciation and got down to business. I was no longer an extra mouth to feed. With the death of Leon, their warrior leader, I was the next-best option. They were a practical people and adapted to the circumstances. I respected that.

The meeting was short, my favorite kind, and the result was simple. No one had seen what I'd seen, but they knew they were under attack. The *why* wasn't important, but the *what to do about it* was. As I said, they were a practical people. In the end, they gave me the keys to the armory and put me in charge of compound defense. An excellent decision.

I got the warriors together for our first powwow. I guess I didn't have the only keys to the armory, because one of the youngsters gave me an enormous .50-caliber sniper rifle. I was touched but, as gifts go, it was useless. I can hit the side of a barn with a sniper rifle, but then I can hit the side of a barn with most things. The purpose of such a weapon is not to hit the barn, but rather project beyond the barn, to damage your enemy before the barn even becomes threatened.

The problem with sniper rifles is they're a highly specialized tool—one that takes years and millions of dollars of training to become adept with. Something I didn't have. Still, the kid had the right idea; we had to project our force. Lying in wait and focusing our firepower just outside the compound walls worked on the Clans, but whatever this was had hurt us from a distance.

The second attack occurred the next day, and it followed exactly the same MO. The damage was much less, as there was less to damage, and the people in the compound just took cover and waited it out. The white-dressed figure sat off at the same distance, in the same place, and took potshots at the same burnt-out buildings. It then mounted its future bike and took off.

Right. Got it. Doing something twice is not enough to be a pattern, but I'm not the patient type. I snagged the kid who gave me the sniper rifle, and he showed me exactly where he found it. Sniper rifles are usually accompanied by spotting scopes, compasses and, most important, kick-ass Ghillie suits. I was going to project myself out there and hope the white-clad figure repeated its actions.

Episode 1 Scene 15 *The Present*

We've been making decent time through Saskatoon. Saskatoon, or Sync City, as it's become known, is a tricky place. This is where The Blink Event happened. This is where humanity took our timeline and threw it in the temporal blender.

We're moving through the outer edges of the city to the north of downtown. We need to swing by the university, or the giant temporal sink that exists where the university used to be, to make it through before nightfall. The time eddies in this area are rough and unpredictable. If I didn't have my ride with me, I wouldn't even bother trying. But why have great ubertech if you can't make dangerous and stupid decisions every once in a while? Besides, the detour around the time sink takes forever, and Mikey's already pissing me off.

"Come on," she says. "You've got to tell me."

"It's classified."

"Classified from who? There's no one else around. 'Classified' was bullshit even before The Blink, grandpa."

"I'm younger than Dwayne," I counter.

"Shit, everyone's younger than Dwayne. He's got to be over forty."

The temptation to lay rubber and get out of here's overwhelming, and it isn't helped by the fact that my ride's enjoying my discomfort. The latest upgrade to my machine included a "personality adjustment" for the vehicle interface, one that's supposedly "compatible with my primary mode of thinking." Obviously then, I'm a complete prick and I hate myself. The Deacons tell us that the bikes are not sentient and that we, the Keepers, are in charge, but try telling that to the two-wheeled bastards. They never listen. Getting my ride to go faster currently wasn't an option.

"Right, change of subject," I order. "Time eddies. What do you know about them?"

"What's there to know? You get sucked into one and hope you have enough breath to survive until you get spat out."

"You ever get caught in one, Mikey?"

She says nothing, playing the cool card. She clearly hasn't. Getting caught inside a time eddy's not something to be cool about. The amount of shit you see as you swirl through the past and future is unnerving. There are only so many times you want to see yourself die. Did I mention that time eddies are personal? Well, they are, a twisting, turning microcosm of your possible pasts and futures: a total mind screw.

"So, you haven't spent much time outside of the fuel depot, right?"

She gives a cool shrug.

"Listen, time eddies are crap," I continue. "They mess with your brain. They can kill you."

"Yeah. So? This is old news."

"But," I carry on over the teenage attitude, "they're better than being killed or captured by a Scyther."

“What?” says a more interested Mikey.

She maneuvers her ATV/sidecar combo closer. My bike balks and judders sideways. I throw my ride a mental smirk. For my bike, Mikey’s ATV is like having a distant mountain relative visit.

“You never want to be captured by a Scyther, especially you. If the Deacons know who you are, so do the Scythers.”

“So the Scythers have a plan?”

Right now, I need to make a decision. How much do I tell her? The Deacons sending me off to chase the Scyther was probably only part of my mission. Finding Mikey and bringing her back for training was undoubtedly the primary goal. It has to be, though why they didn’t tell me about her is unknown. They would just give the standard excuse of “knowing events which are occurring in the time web can lead to catastrophic temporal shifts.” Shit. That sounds a lot like “classified” or “need to know.” I make my decision.

“Scythers don’t plan. Scythers are soldiers. They’re the equivalent of Keepers.”

“So they’re like you,” she says.

“Kind of. Though with less autonomy.”

“I don’t get it. I thought they just killed us.”

“Yeah, well, they do that, but it’s under direction.”

“Someone’s telling them what to do?”

“Someone or something. We don’t know, but they’re being coordinated.”

I shake my head. There’s a lot we don’t know about Scythers, and their tendency to explode instead of being captured has left us with nothing to study.

“So what’s that got to do with me being captured? Why’s a time eddy better?”

My smile's grim. "What we do know is Scythors were originally human."

"So . . ."

"DNA shows that some of the destroyed Scythors were us."

"Us? People?"

"Yeah, but not that," I respond. "A lot of them were former Keepers. Ones we thought were dead."

"Oh," Mikey says. "So if I get caught . . ."

"You get a whole lot of wetware jammed in your head, and you go off and kill a ton of innocent people."

She continues to bump alongside me. The going's rough, but her ride's doing OK. She's deep in thought. It's not a look that suits her. She pulls herself back to reality and grimaces.

"You'd better tell me more about time eddies, Keeper."

Episode 1 Scene 16

The Past

I'd forgotten how much Ghillie suits itch and how much bugs like to get into sweaty crevasses. I'd been out in the sun for five or six hours and needed the cool of the evening. I didn't know when the white-clad dude would be back, but I wanted it to be soon. I'm too old for this shit.

My weapons were basic: two grenades, a handgun, and a Ka-Bar. As far as knives go, the Ka-Bar's my favorite, and as far as close-quarter weapons go, it comes out on top again. It doesn't jam, it doesn't run out of ammo, and when you stick it in someone, they become deeply unhappy.

The daylight and heat bled out of the sky, and the temperature got cooler. I was confident the pattern would be repeated. It needed to be. The two previous attacks reminded me of the

initial War Clan skirmishes, only from a distance. The first Clan clashes were limited affairs: they turn up, attack the front door, and kill or get killed. Nothing in the way of a game plan. The creature in white has done the same thing twice. Third strike and it's out.

The moon had swung halfway up into the night sky when he arrived. He was much later than the first two times, but that made no difference. I was now close enough to see the figure, and it was definitely more male than female. He stopped in the same spot and dismounted. He opened a compartment on the side of the vehicle and pulled out the mechanism I'd seen previously.

He followed the same routine. He placed the mechanism to his eyes, found a target and lowered the device. I could've lobbed a grenade then and there, but I wanted to see how it fired. He reached forward and pressed an icon on the screen. A hole puckered open in the rear of his vehicle, there was a quiet *whoosh* and a projectile spat out. It looked like a gob of silly putty, and ten seconds later, there was a large explosion in the compound, right where the generator had been. Again with the repetition.

The figure stood and watched; I waited. I was betting on him going for the grain storage shed again. He lifted the device to his eyes. He targeted and pressed the icon. Bet won. Time for action.

I exploded from the camouflage and sprinted at him. Shit, lying on the ground all that time had done me no favors. Any stealth was out the window. At the noise, the figure spun elegantly around and, as he did so, I caught sight of the screen. On it was an infrared image of a man wearing a Ghillie suit stumbling across a dark background. I'd been fucking played.

I reached for my gun and started firing before I took accurate aim. I was hoping to shock him into doing something stupid; I needn't have bothered. The bullets didn't even make it

halfway to him before they dropped to the ground. I tossed the gun at him; same result. I jinked sideways and went into a roll. I'd seen a deepish depression in the earth off to my left. I tumbled into the depression, unclipped a grenade, ripped out the safety pin, and lobbed it in his general direction. It went off. Take that and die.

I slowly raised myself from the shallow ditch. He was nowhere to be seen.

Episode 1 Scene 17 *The Present*

“There,” whispers Mikey. “The 7-Eleven.”

I follow the direction of her arm and sure enough, behind a preserved convenience store, there's another one: a time eddy. This one's the size of a green garbage bin, the kind they used to collect recycling. Huh, recycling, saving the planet. Not so important now.

Being this close to the university gives me the shits. It also doesn't help that the evening's closing in. The number of eddies we've run into is far more than usual, and it's slowing us down. We're going to get caught outside for the night, and that's a bad plan.

We jig our vehicles away from the time eddy. It wobbles slightly as if detecting our movements. The Deacons say the eddies are simply a result of the freaky physics that exist around the temporal sink, and that they are in no way alive. But from my experience, and from what other Keepers have said, they have a tendency to latch on to your presence and tag along if you don't move away quickly.

We ease on the gas and pick up speed. The eddy wobbles faster, and then breaks off. It can't keep up. I check the heads-up display in my helmet. It's not following us. I've neglected to mention the detection capabilities of my helmet to Mikey and have instead appointed her chief

time-eddy watcher. It's good practice for her, I rationalize, and it keeps her conversation to a minimum. At least, it did.

“What the hell happened here?” she asks.

Mikey's looking at the edge of the temporal sink. Behind the mostly opaque curtain shimmering not too far ahead of us, we can see the form and shape of buildings. The buildings pulse with a rhythm similar to that of a human heart. Sometimes they beat in a coordinated manner, like right now; other times, they're all over the place.

“Ground zero,” I say. “The Blink Event happened here.”

She looks around and spots more time eddies in the distance. They're no threat, so she doesn't bother mentioning them. I can live with that.

“I'm too young,” she says.

“Too young for what?”

“I don't remember The Blink. I don't know what it was like before. I've spent my life cascading all over the place. The past doesn't seem important.”

“Where have you been?” I ask, referencing the cascades.

I don't like to think too hard about life before The Blink. First of all, it's not relevant. Second, I was a prick back then. I'm still a prick but, back then, it wasn't completely necessary. Though, if I'm totally honest with myself, being a prick gave me the emotional makeup to become a Keeper. Once again, I justify my own personality shortcomings. Now that's an underappreciated life skill.

“I've been up and down, though mainly up,” she replies.

“How far up? I know I met your old man around 2040.”

“Yeah, I was a kid then, learning the rig. My brother was teaching me.”

“When did we take him?”

“Not sure. Four, five years ago, something like that.”

Her brother’s probably a Keeper then, fully trained. Either that or dead.

“So 2040’s as far as you’ve been?”

“Nope, got to somewhere around 2100. There’s weird shit happening around then.”

“Ain’t that the truth?”

As a Keeper, I’ve been a lot farther up and down than your average fuel-depot citizen, and 2100 is likely as far as someone of Mikey’s era would go. Other groups and communities get cascaded much farther away. The larger the grouping, the more likely they are to end up somewhere completely outside their own era. We think it’s a question of survivability: bigger groups supposedly have a greater chance of living. But no one really knows. Or at least no one’s telling.

“So what happened here?” she repeats, looking around at the shimmering curtain.

We bump along the mainly paved street that runs at the edge of the university. There are plenty of potholes around, but then there always have been. We’re closer to the curtain now, but that doesn’t help in seeing more detail behind it. The street has an abandoned feel to it. It’s unlikely we’ll encounter anyone around here. The constant presence of time eddies sees to that.

I sigh. “Someone fucked around with something, and everything time-shifted.”

“What? They teach you that in Keeper school? That’s not even close to an explanation.”

I sigh again. “It was the synchrotron. At the university. A scientist developed a theory that smashing certain exotic particles together at near-light speeds would open up a time window.”

“A synchrotron?” she says, trying out the word.

“It’s a machine, a giant donut-shaped machine that accelerates particles. It’s used to study shit.”

“And they used this to mess with time.”

This is out of my league. The shit they spoon-fed us when The Blink happened could fill a lake. Wave after wave of technical explanations, followed by fervent promises that this would never happen again, and finally soothing platitudes that everything was OK. Crock. Of. Shit. Especially when the War Clans arrived and started massacring people.

“Yeah, listen, ask one of the Deacons. They’ll give you the full nine yards,” I pause.

“And you’ll still know nothing.”

This gets me a moment of silence. My eyes flick to the heads-up display. My n-comm tingles, and my bike notches its defensive posture up a level. The two time eddies are still registering on the outer edge of the display. But this is not enough to concern my ride, not by a long shot.

My armor begins to harden and my shoulder-mounted threat tubes twitch as ordnance gets pumped in. I check the display to see what ammo I have access to in this time zone. Light shards. Sexy. I love light shards. And depleted-uranium cluster units. Shit. DUCs. That’s heavy-duty. When depleted uranium comes up, that means Scyther time.

“What the hell’s going on, Keeper?” demands Mikey.

She’s seen what’s happening to my armor and weapons, and she’s a little nervous. It’s hard not to be. Seeing a Keeper getting their groove on is intimidating. We’re not peacekeepers; we’re battle platforms. We’re supposed to scare the shit out of people.

“Scyther, probably.”

“Probably?”

“The temporal sink messes up sensors. I can only see up to the curtain.”

“The curtain?”

“Yeah, up to where the time eddies are.”

There’s a moment of silence. “You can see the time eddies?”

Oops. I no longer have a time-eddy-watcher-in-chief. Change of subject.

“We’ve got to move.”

“Higher ground? A building?” she suggests.

At least she’s not pissed at me.

“Higher ground?” I echo, raising my eyebrows.

“Yeah, tactics, strategy, you know.”

I shake my head. With Scythers, anything less than a small hill, and your “higher ground” gets exploded right out from underneath you. Scythers have excellent heavy-duty munitions, and standing still, especially on higher ground like a building, makes you a juicy target. Most surviving compounds and fuel depots have substantial lower walls to stop this tactic. Regular buildings from around the old twentieth century do not.

“We move and we keep low.”

“Can you track it on your helmet?”

“Yeah, soon. The bike’s working on cutting interference.”

“Does it know we’re here?”

Excellent question. Scyther technology, from what we can work out, is similar to our own. They’re better in some areas, and we’re better in others. Currently, we have the edge in tracking tech. They’re slightly more durable in a firefight, and it’s usually a wash when it comes to weaponry. Keepers need to hit first and hit hard. If you come in late to a Scyther fight, you’ll

likely end up dead. Like us, they're also limited by the rule that prevents Keepers from using technology too far ahead of the era they find themselves in.

"Chances are it doesn't," I reply. "The temporal sink messes with their tech, too."

I get a warble from my ride and the display switches over tracking. An icon pulses in the top left-hand corner of the screen. The icon shows a tall figure with a skull for a face and black flowing robes. The skull's grinning, and its right hand carries a long-handled reaping device. A Scyther: this is what passes for humor in my bike's so-called nonsentient brain. Very funny.

Episode 1 Scene 18

The Past

I rolled out of the shallow depression and struggled to my feet. My burst across the prairies had wrenched some usually dormant muscles, but I'd got the job done. Whatever he was, he was down. There's nothing like a grenade to put a guy on his ass. Except I couldn't see the body. I was getting concerned about this when the figure clambered up from behind his bike. The bastard was still alive and mobile.

He looked rough in the pale light, but, let's face it, he looked damn good for someone who'd just copped the full blast of a grenade. Sections of clothing were torn away, and black oily blood was weeping from deep cuts. His left arm was askew at the elbow. He fixed this by giving it a solid tug and popping it back into place. This really got my attention. That must've hurt, and he didn't make a sound.

He searched around for the mechanism that controlled his weapons system. He found it. All busted up. Thank Christ, his equipment wasn't as tough as him. I did a quick gear check of my own: gun, gone; grenade, useless at close quarters; and Ka-Bar. I tugged the knife out of its sheath and held it by my side. It made me feel better.

He stopped his search and spent time considering me. A shredded hood covered most of his face, but what I could see glinted in the moonlight. He was human. Well, mainly human, but he'd been augmented, and metal was melded into his skin. This, unlike my knife, didn't make me feel better.

Now that he'd looked me over, he turned away. Apparently I wasn't considered a worthy threat. This pissed me off. I thought I'd introduced myself sufficiently when I tossed the grenade at him. Clearly he had an attention-span issue. The guy then pulled up the sleeve of his garment. He focused on his forearm and tapped at a panel fused into his flesh. There was a spark from his arm and he jumped back. Something wasn't working properly. I needed to make contact.

"Hey!" I yelled. "What do you want?"

The figure's head swiveled. Eyes peered at me from beneath the hood, and the voice, when he finally answered, had a metallic edge to it.

"You, Jack. I want you dead."

I have to admit, he got me. Not the dead bit, that was par for the course these past few years, but how the hell did he know my name?

"What, how?" I spluttered. "Do I know you?"

He gave a hollow laugh. "We know you. That's why I'm here to kill you."

What the hell was going on? I shifted onto the balls of my feet. I needed to be alert. The guy looked weaponless. All his toys were either blown up or on the fritz, but he'd already survived a grenade blast, and I had no idea what he was.

"How about we chat, you know, get to know each other?" I suggested.

"Not an option, Jack." He shot a frustrated look at the smoking panel in his arm and a sharp shake of his head. "We're going to have to do this the old-fashioned way."

The figure grabbed his left hand with his right and twisted. The hand pulled away from his forearm, dragging with it a whole mass of bioelectric shit: wires, blood, fiber-optic cables . . . you know, the normal crap you see inside a tech-infused human.

He then raised his left arm and cracked it like a whip. The hand zipped past my face, but the trailing wires didn't. They latched onto the side of my head, wrapped around the top of my dome, and cut deep. The wires sliced through the thin skin and blood erupted. I screamed and instinctively jerked the Ka-Bar up and cut through the wire and other crap. I heard the sound of the hand fall behind me, and the pain dialed back a fraction. Head injuries are bleeders, but there are no major arteries up there to kill you quick. I gave my eyes a hasty wipe to clear the blood, and I saw the guy looking at his handless arm in disbelief. How fucked up was that? It was OK for him to disconnect his bionic hand and throw it at me, but when I cut it off, he couldn't believe it.

I then played offense. The evening was light, and my gun was only a few feet away. I took two quick paces and grabbed it. Judging by the weight, there were still a few rounds in the mag. I pulled back the slide, and the snicking noise of an engaged weapon got the guy's attention.

I pointed the gun at the figure in white, and he smiled. He raised his remaining hand in the universal stop gesture. Fuck that. I pulled the trigger and shot him three times. It was an excellent grouping, but best of all, the prick stopped smiling. Whatever force field had protected him before was no longer working. Black blood oozed from the wounds, and the guy started to twitch. I'd hit something major.

I moved in closer and took a hack at him with the knife. He tried to leap away, but something inside him was broken. The blade slid across his ribs. More black blood flowed. It looked like old engine oil.

My own blood continued to leak into my eyes. I gave them another wipe. The figure continued to stand there. He was jittery and his limbs kept twitching. He wasn't fully in control of his own body.

“What are you?” I demanded.

The man laughed. It wasn't pleasant. It wasn't supposed to be.

“I'm your future, Jack,” he said.

With a defeated sigh, he reached under his tattered garment and twisted. A panel on his chest lit up. It was circular, and the light within was clicking down. It got smaller, segment by segment. Oh shit. A timer. The guy was in self-destruct mode. I turned and ran. Torn muscles protested. I tried to get away.

I wasn't quick enough.

Episode 1 Scene 19 *The Present*

The pulsing Scyther icon comes and goes. My bike's doing its best to keep a bead on it, but the temporal sink and the curtain surrounding it make it tough. We're on the move, trying to gain an advantage in this constantly changing environment, trying to give me a clean first shot. My weapon tubes twitch every time the Scyther appears on the display. They're looking forward to the action. It's been a while.

“Is it always like this?” whispers Mikey.

She's been good so far, nice and quiet and following instructions, but the ATV-sidecar combo she's riding is another story. It works OK in the open. It can churn through the rough patches, but in a game of hide-and-kill, it's a liability.

I shrug. "It's never always like this. It's always different."

And this is basically the truth. Keepers operate across time and space, protecting their charges and hunting down Scythers. The consequence of this is an ever-evolving battleground, a constant changing of weapons and tactics. Right now, the fact that I have light shards and DUCs available as weaponry surprises me. I thought I was further back in time.

Light shards don't come online until post-2050. I thought I was around 2015, maybe 2020 at a pinch. Access to this ammo shouldn't happen until twenty years up the line, around 2035 or so. Usually our weapons are only one or two generations from where we find ourselves. Perhaps the time sink is influencing the rules.

The black Scyther icon blinks back in. My weapons twitch again, trying to get a lock. The tubes are an extension of my exo-armor and, like my ride, are semiautonomous, which means they listen to me. Most of the time.

"Why don't you just pull the trigger? You know, take a shot at it?" questions Mikey.

"We're not in a fuel depot. When I take a shot, all hell's going to break loose."

"So?"

"So, my bike will protect me from the worst of it, but you'll probably be outside its defensive parameters."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"If I shoot first and miss, you die."

This gets me silence. We continue to curve around the edge of the curtain. The time eddies are denser here and are a major pain in the ass. Mikey no longer informs me of their locations. Fair enough. I wouldn't either in her position.

We pull up next to a building. It was a restaurant or a bar. Mikey pops her head around the corner for a quick glance. No harm in that. My display has the Scyther at a safe distance away, and the time eddies between me and it make a decent shot improbable. There's also no way it can see me. We're going to have to get closer.

"What the hell's that?" says Mikey.

She jerks her head back and presses herself against the wall. I lift my primary display. The echo of its image plays across my retina. If the Scyther gets too close, I should know about it. Whatever Mikey's spotted, it's not tech-heavy enough to register with the bike. Good old-fashioned eyesight's going to have to do the trick.

I slide down the wall and belly along to the corner. Mikey has seen a lot of shit in her short time on earth, so if something surprises her, it's best to be cautious. I peer around the corner. Twenty yards away is a good-size time eddy, and it's just ejected a still-dazed War Clan Battle Master. I can tell what she is by the number of human bones woven into her hair. The more bones, the higher up you are, and this warrior's at the top of her game.

"Battle Master," I mutter.

"What's a Battle Master doing here? Where the hell's her Clan?"

"Really? You're bitching about the fact she hasn't got another hundred killers with her?"

"Right, I guess not. It's just that . . ."

"You've never seen a Battle Master before," I say.

This is far from unusual. For a normal citizen, the first time you see a Battle Master up close is the last time you see a Battle Master. The War Clans are a vicious and bloodthirsty lot, and to be an overachiever in this group means you know how to kill. The bigger anomaly here is, what's a Battle Master doing in this zone when there's a Scyther present? I've never heard of the two groups mixing.

“What are we going to do?”

“You're going to do nothing. Let me take care of it.”

I yank down my visor and the full heads-up display cycles back in. The Scyther's still over by the curtain, only one time eddy between it and me. That's not good. I need to be quick. The Battle Master barely registers on the display. This is normal. Knives and swords don't carry enough of the heavy metals the bike's currently geared up to detect.

The woman's still lying on the ground, the eddy twisting and winking before her. She's slowly sitting up and taking in her surroundings. She's making noises that tell me she's not a happy Battle Master. A time eddy does that to you. She gets herself up on one knee and is about to stand when I scoot up behind her, grab her under the armpits, and heave her back into the eddy. There's a small sucking sound and she's gone. Job done.

I walk back to Mikey, a small smile on my face. She's looking at me like I just broke her favorite gun.

“Why didn't you kill her?”

“What do you think two quick trips in a time eddy does?”

“You mean, that can kill you?”

“Beats me, but problem solved.”

“But . . . ,” starts Mikey.

My earpiece shrieks and I fling myself forward, cannoning into the rig-rat. My ride fires up a shield, its defenses on max. There's a roar and a shudder, and the building above erupts into shattered fragments of masonry. Shit. The other time eddy must've shifted. The Scyther spotted us and got the first shot off. My heads-up display's now showing a misty orange overlay. This is not good.

Episode 1 Scene 20 *The Past*

Christ, my head hurt, the parts I could feel. The first person I saw after the explosion was the person who stitched me back together. She was a vet, the animal type, not the war type, which was good because pieces of me had been flapping all over the place.

When the Scyther blew, shards of shrapnel whizzed all over the place. My body armor was enough to protect my torso, but my head and lower limbs were brutally smashed. Slices of scalp had peeled away, and there were large and anatomically interesting gashes in both my legs. According to the animal doc, I was lucky. I didn't feel lucky.

The people inside the compound had been reluctant to come out and see what had happened. I can't say I blamed them. The Scyther had been taking shots at them and, well, they probably weren't as invested in me as I'd thought.

Eventually, a few brave souls ventured out and found me not far from the still-smoking bike and Scyther. Whatever explosive he'd used, it was effective. There was little they could salvage. They were, however, nice enough to grab me, and the rest was all about recuperation.

I lay on the cot for about two weeks, eating, sleeping, and getting fed scraps of information. We weren't the only group to encounter this new force, but we were one of the few

to survive. A large number of compounds had either been completely destroyed or had split into smaller groups and disappeared as best they could.

On day sixteen of recovery, I was allowed to get up and move about. The doc admonished me not to move too vigorously. Little chance of that happening, but I nodded anyway and staggered to the common room where I knew I'd find something real to drink.

Life was improving. I had my hand wrapped around a mug of clear liquid and was vaguely focusing into the middle distance. The guy serving as bartender didn't question my need for booze, even looking the way I did. This was something I appreciated about this quasi-postapocalyptic chaos that we found ourselves in. The holier-than-thou nonsmoking, non-drinking, gluten-free human sheep, who were appearing in increasing numbers when The Blink happened, largely didn't make it. Smarter people than me have debated the significance of this occurrence, but not me. Good riddance.

The middle distance I was locked on to was losing clarity, so I had another swig and refocused on something closer. It was then the common room door swung open. The bartender stopped cleaning glasses and stared at the two strangers. It wasn't a pleasant look. The men silhouetted in the doorway were wearing uniforms, but I didn't recognize the type. They looked more army than police, but who can tell? The amount of military-grade equipment the police had access to prior to The Blink ostensibly made them a paramilitary force anyway, and times had only gotten worse.

The two hitched up whatever crap they had hanging from their oversize belts and ball-walked over to my table. You know the walk: the one where the cop/manager/guy-in-charge walks around his nuts to show everyone how truly large he is. Well, I now had a pair of them swaying their way in my direction. This was supposed to be intimidating. They stood directly in

front of me and turned up the threat level. I took another swig of the clear brew and waited. Put a drink in front of me, and I can be the most patient bastard on earth. They didn't know this.

They continued to stand in front of me, trying to bully me into speaking first. They'd probably read the book that said this was the best way to get people to reveal their true intentions. That was funny. In my experience, it was the last words said that carried the most weight. I continued playing their childish game. I'd been lying on a cot for two weeks; for me this was high-class entertainment.

Then I finished my drink.

So I ordered another.

This got a sigh from the junior of the two. "Trevayne," he stated.

What? Again, with my name. How come everyone knows me all of a sudden? I'd told no one in the compound about the bizarre conversation I had with the Scyther. Some shit's best left untold until you've worked out what the hell it means. And the only name people know me by here is Jack.

"Jacques Trevayne," Junior tried again.

The full name now, and pronounced correctly. It was time to be polite.

"Jack or Trevayne. No one calls me Jacques."

Junior pulled open a khaki bike-messenger-type bag and grabbed a clipboard. He deftly made a note of this riveting piece of information. I glanced at his counterpart and raised an eyebrow. The older guy shrugged. This was the one I should be talking to.

"What can I do for you?" I offered.

"We need to talk," said Junior.

"Fine. Take a seat. Have a drink," I raised my glass. "It does the job."

“That’s inappropriate behavior for us while we—” Junior got cut off by a firm grip to the arm.

“Sounds like a good idea,” said the senior of the two. “For me. Go wait in the truck.”

Junior didn’t even blink. He followed orders and left. I waved over at the bartender for more drinks. He nodded and brought them across to the bench. Senior reached into his bag, pulled out a handful of batteries and placed them on the table. The bartender looked pleased and grabbed a couple. Senior had skills.

Batteries were a de facto currency in many compounds. Everyone outside major cities was off the grid. Most had generators for community electricity, but these were often shut down overnight. Batteries to power small devices were valuable, and the companies that produced them were extremely well-guarded. Most people living in still-viable major population centers didn’t know this or didn’t care. This guy was better informed.

I took a slug of the drink. Shit, it was water. I glanced at the bartender. He looked me in the eye and shook his head. I’d been cut off. The man opposite me took a mouthful of his brew. His eyes watered and bulged. He was on the real stuff. Damn, the bartender was looking after me.

“What do they call you?” I asked.

“The name’s Rhiel,” he stated and offered his hand.

We shook. It had been a while since I’d done that.

“What do you want?”

“Back in the old days, you’d have called it a consult.”

“A consult?”

“Yeah, you know, we ask you questions and you give us the benefit of your,” he paused and searched for the word, “expertise.”

“My expertise,” I echoed. “And what exactly am I an expert in?”

Rhiel waved his hand in the air. It took in much of the room. “Compound defense, tactics, weaponry.”

I coughed in disbelief. I was good, but there were plenty out there equally skilled. It had to be something else. And, as far as I knew, there was only one thing unique about me.

“Scythers,” I guessed. “You really want to know about Scythers.”

The man leaned forward, both forearms on the table, his hands wrapped around his drink.

He nodded. “Ahh, now there we have it.”

“Why me?”

“Oh, that’s easy,” he smiled. “You’re the only one who has survived a direct encounter.”

Episode 1 Scene 21

The Present

“Why the hell aren’t we dead?”

“Give it time. We’ve half a building on top of us,” I answer.

“But, we should be crushed.”

“The bike’s protecting us. It’s got a field up.”

“And the Scyther?” Mikey asks.

“Probably cueing up for the kill shot,”

“So what’s stopping it?”

“The same half a building that’s on us,” I say. “That, and the bike’s running interference.”

The heads-up display's continues to be overlaid in orange, so we're still not good. But at least we're not at the red stage. You see red and you'd better be re-familiarizing yourself with your deity of choice. The bike's shield is solid. It can hold for a while, especially since it's been fueled up recently. But we don't want to start taking direct hits from the Scyther.

"What can you see from where you are?" I ask the rig-rat.

The helmet display shows a small tunnel heading off into the guts of the building. It's possible Mikey could squeeze through.

"It's pretty dusty, but, I don't know, a gap maybe?"

"Can you get in there, squeeze through?"

"Yeah, maybe, probably. You want me to try?"

I give this scenario a quick think. With her out of the way, more proactive options open up. The n-comm bleeps and the bike beams the icon for the DUCs into my neural pathway. The depleted-uranium pellets would get most of the building off us and possibly make a dent or two in the Scyther, but Mikey would have to be somewhere else.

"Yeah, do it. My display says you've got a tunnel, maybe all the way through. Head forward and down, not left or right."

"Forward and down, got it." Mikey shuffles around and gets oriented. Shit, she's got guts. She didn't even question the decision.

"When you hit the basement, find a storage room, or freezer, something like that. Get in and shut the door."

"Yep, got it," she confirms. "And, Keeper . . ."

"Yeah, Mikey? What?"

"Don't die on me, or I'll come back and kick your dead ass."

I laugh. "I'll give you sixty seconds before I shoot."

There's a distant boom and a shudder, and small pebbles and debris fall around the edges of the force field. The Scyther must be trying to clear its way in.

"I'm going to turn the shielding off. You head for the gap."

My bike complies and the shielding goes down. The small, secure area that formed around the shield remains solid, and Mikey crawls off.

My n-comm goes into active mode, and I consider my options. They all involve setting off heavy ordnance and hoping I can ride it out. Between the bike's shielding and my armor at maximum, this should be doable.

I switch across to infrared and check the display. Mikey's off-screen and probably somewhere more secure than here. There's no point waiting around. I brace myself against the bike; my semiautonomous weaponry has calculated the rough trajectory to fire up through the mass of rubble. We don't need to hit the Scyther, just get close.

I set off a light shard, and the compressed photon packet sears its way through the stone and rebar. A light shard's essentially a laser in a bottle. It cuts through anything solid and explodes on impact. It won't get through a frequency-modulating Scyther shield but that's fine, I'm just using it to clear a path for the DUCs.

The depleted-uranium pellets inside the canisters I have in my other threat tube violate all of the international arms agreements from my time period, but that type of useless legislation hasn't been enforceable for years. Besides, when you're up against a Scyther, you want any edge you can get.

The shard does its job: a pathway's cleared. But that's strange. Through the narrow channel, my ride scans the Scyther more clearly. The shard missed the target. Not a problem. We

were just making it easier for the DUC to get through. What's strange is the Scyther. It has no shielding up. It's completely exposed. Whatever. It's not like I'm paid to play fair.

The threat tube spits out the DUC, and the bike's shield flares to full power. I wait. Nothing happens. No explosion. Shit. I n-comm my ride. It drops the shield for an instant, pulses the collapsed building around us, and shoots back confirmation. The DUC's out there; it just didn't detonate. Christ, unexploded ordnance is a pain in the ass in any era.

I cycle through my options. I don't want to send another DUC up the pipe: the risk of a sympathetic detonation's too great. I'm not sure my shielding can handle two DUCs going off simultaneously.

There's another thump as the Scyther chips away at the rubble. Something's not making sense. The Scyther's taking a softly, softly approach, removing the barriers between us a layer at a time. Why the hell would it do that? Sure, it doesn't know precisely where we are, but that's what you've got the big bombs for. They take the guesswork out of killing. And why no shield?

Another thump and more slippage of rocks outside the protective dome. My display shows the narrow opening Mikey crawled through has now collapsed. Good. That'll make it more difficult for the Scyther to detect her. There's a strong chance she'll get out of this. I think more and consult with my ride. I get it to run a diagnostic on the dud DUC. Crap. The DUC isn't a dud: the Scyther's running a suppression algorithm to prevent the explosion. That's why there's no shielding. This tech's way up the line, so far ahead of this era I didn't even contemplate it as a possibility. Somebody's messing with the rules.

The bike fires me a short warble and flicks across to the tracking display. Enough of the surface rubble has gone for us to get a full scan of the Scyther. This is good for two reasons. First, we can see it, but it can't see us—our tracking technology advantage. We can now target

the Scyther without it immediately realizing; we have a second chance at a first shot. But how useful is that given the suppression algorithm?

Second, we get to see exactly what we're dealing with. My ride gives a shrill whistle; it's not a happy vehicle. It's getting conflicting readings, but the Scyther's at least a generation beyond us. I've dealt with something like this type before, but then we were more appropriately equipped. Perhaps this explains the light shards and DUCs I have available—someone on our side's also not playing by the rules.

I give myself a couple more seconds. I see a way out of this now, but my concern's longer term. The only difference in this deadly dance of Keeper vs. Scyther is the personnel involved. Not us, not me and the Scyther. Variations of that ballet have played out across time and space for a while now. The only new player's Mikey. She must be the only reason the Scyther hasn't gone ballistic on me. It doesn't want her dead. Interesting. But I save it for later. Now it's action time.

My threat tube jerks alive. My ride drops the shield for a microsecond, and a light shard streaks off. One big advantage light shards have over more kinetic ammo is the speed that you can get one off. They also cause a hell of a dent, even if they don't explode. And a suppression algorithm won't physically stop them. It'll need to be dealt with. My shield blinks back up, and things begin to get interesting.

The Scyther instantly detects our shield reduction and the trajectory of the light shard. Its own defensive system swipes up. Man, they're quick. As the Scyther's defensive maneuver is completed, the command signal to the suppression algorithm is cut. I smile.

Boom goes the DUC.

Depleted-uranium pellets cause a hell of a mess, and the comparative lack of rubble between the blast cone and the Scyther makes for an excellent impromptu kill zone. The Scyther's shielding gets shredded, but it and the vehicle remain relatively intact. My shield drops, and another light shard arrows through the debris and strikes the Scyther bike. Kill the bike and the self-destruct automatically triggers.

Boom goes the Scyther.

I share an n-comm high five with my ride and chalk this particular fuckup to experience: don't take your eyes off a Scyther while chucking a War Clan Battle Master through a time eddy. Hell, that shit's so wise, you could make a T-shirt out of it. All I had to do now was find Mikey.