



# **Chapter 25: Half-Millenia Monsters**

Dave Barker wiped the sweat off his face. The bomber was diving too fast, and the controls weren't responding. After all the flack they had taken, he wasn't surprised, but he still tried` jerking the controls, flipping the switches. He knew he was dead, but he still tried. He looked at the picture of Katherine he had pinned up on the console. He sighed.

"Our lives are just, corporeal tangents you know." He said, stirring the coffee a year and a half ago. She laughed, "What on earth does that even mean?"

"It means that our souls are eternal, we live on in our spirits and the lives we touch. Bits of us live on in humanity, we keep around bits of our history just by the act of existing. Each of us is just a corporeal manifestation of a part of the larger story of humanity, a tangent that is going to end someday in a grave. But though the tangent stops, the writer always gets back on course, and takes us somewhere new, carrying on parts of the past, not the best or the most good parts, more important than that, the parts that mattered enough for us to make as corporeal in our own flesh."

"You are a pretentious snot Dave." He smiled, "I am, but I honestly believe that."

She raised her cup of coffee in a sort of salute, "Then maybe sincerity is part of your tangent."

"Maybe I can be part of yours."

"Is that your pick up line? A giant rambling pseudo-philosophical rant? Seriously."

He shrugged, "I can't do anything better than a rambling rant, especially the pseudo-philosophical kind." She smirked. "Then maybe sincerity is something I can get behind. At the very least, it will make an interesting tangent." He'd made her that pin, and now she'd never see him--

THUD.

He looked behind him, there was a woman there in a slightly baggy grey-white jumpsuit with a strange metal collar, she had a helmet in one of her hands, and glasses on her face.

"How the--"

"No time." The woman pulled out something like a blow torch, and burned out a chunk of the floor in a split second. Jerry had come up from the back and was staring as well. She reached in, and placed a weird thing like a disk with metal spider legs in the hole, which began gyrating and whipping its limbs around. He felt the controls responding to his touch, and he jerked the plane back into the air.

"Special agent Graelyn Scythes. Don't ask how I got on the plane, its classified or something. Oh and look, I have a pin that looks just like yours, remember that."

"Dave what's going on?"

"Shut up Jerry. Now Dave, lets get this plane back home."

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They landed to some surprise, and there was a big bustle as people ran up to the airplane. "How did you make it out alive?" the usual banal banter you get when people survive an ambush.

Graelyn rolled her eyes at the soldiers and officers who questioned why she was here, and flashed her forged identification, and then saw the base commander whom she showed her forged letter from FDR to. Knowing where she was going had its advantages. She didn't pay too much attention through all of it, She heard a big mix of "its an honor to have you here" and sexist 1940's garbage. She took the boat back to the country called the "United States" with all the enthusiasm of someone forced to go on a vacation they didn't want to. She tried to enjoy herself, to see the sights and taste the treats, but it all felt hollow. The boat rocked on the ocean as she sunned herself on the deck reading a book. The captain had protested, but she had a letter from FDR. She read a paperback copy of "the Great Gatsby", a book about a man who tried to bring the past back by building his own private empire. But the past didn't come back and somebody shot him dead. "You can't bring back the past."

“Oh but you can, old sport. You can.”

She rubbed her eyes from under her large sunglasses. Everyone wanted to go to the past it seemed but Graelyn, and she was the only one doing it. Life was often ironic and unfair. She thought about Arch, longing for his lost family. She could see him turning into Gatsby, rebuilding his home and trying to replicate his strange dead society... But it wouldn't work. She looked out at the ocean and it felt as far away to her as her own passions. She closed the paperback, finished, and turned over to sun her back. This tangent had no meaning to her, but at least she could get a tan.

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She was greeted at the docks by many men in military uniforms. She wished there had been some women in the gang sent to find her, and was sorely disappointed by the past.

“Graelyn Scythes?” A man in a very starched uniform said.

“Thats-a-me.” She replied.

“By the order of the United States Government, you're under arrest for forging executive documents.”

“Am I?” She replied.

“You treasonous dog.”

“I'm not a US Citizen you know, I'm actually Russian.” He scowled.

“Pink commie.”

“I literally celebrate Alexander Hamilton's birthday as a holiday, lets not get carried away here.” The man's scowl deepened.

“I have orders to take your disrespectful self to meet with the President himself. Now I don't know why he wants to meet with you...”

“Because I'm a hero, now get me in the car already.” She sighed, leaning on the rail of the gangplank. He narrowed his eyes.

“Follow me.”

The White House was a museum, in Graelyn's time, and she'd visited there when her Father in Annapolis had gotten some visitation time with her. He'd shown her through the building, telling her facts about the different rooms. She'd even gotten to sit in the President's chair. The museum didn't get that many visitors, but it got enough to keep itself funded. She had spun around in the chair a few times while the tour guide texted his boyfriend on his cellphone, and imagined ruling a nation from that spot.

“I could get used to this.” She had thought to herself.

“Come on Graelie, I'll show you the picture of your favorite.” Holding his hand, they walked to the painting of Alexander Hamilton. She stared. Slowly, they made their way through paintings of other important figures.

“Who is that one dad?”

“That,” her father said, “is Franklin Dellano Roosevelt. He, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin helped win World War II together. He also interred people from Japan in camps during the war.”

“You mean Japanese spies?”

“No, just everyday people.” She nodded, and they moved on. She wished, as she was led through the White House while it was actually used, that she had paid more attention then. She was wearing her

dress clothes again, rather than the spacesuit, so at least she looked nice, even if she was still looking massively anachronistic. A man led her to the President's office, and opened the door. Stepping in, she saw the silhouette of a man at a desk, a thin line of smoke rising from a cigarette in a holder in his mouth.

"So," FDR began, "you're our mysterious visitor."

"And you're the leader of the Former Uni- of the United States of America." An eyebrow raised on the man's face, and he gestured for her to come closer. He didn't look as ominous up close. He looked tired, ill, old. "My name is Graelyn Scythes."

"So I've been told. You saved one of our airplanes, popping in out of nowhere on it, and then saved the pilot and the crew from certain death. Then you used a forged letter I never wrote in order to get through several layers of security." Graelyn nodded, taking a seat in front of the desk.

"Yep, that about sums it up actually."

"So then, I think you owe me an explanation." Graelyn shrugged, reached into her pocket, pulled out her tablet, and switched it to hologram projection mode. She then pulled up a hologram of a man walking on the moon, not Neil Armstrong obviously, just a guy taking a casual stroll, with the Earth in the background. The cigarette fell out of FDR's mouth, smattering ash on the desk.

"I'm from the future." She said. He nodded dumbly. "I've been sent here by the... United Nations Time Policing force. I'm here to retrieve another member of our personnel that..." She was lying now, and winging it, and hoping she sounded believable. "...fell into enemy hands. It could upset the United States winning the war."

"Good God, another one of you."

"What?"

"I mean, another time traveler. You get briefed on this when you become president, but I assumed three was going to be my limit. And none of them showed off their..." He waved at the hologram. "Usually they just shoot something in the office dramatically so it vaporizes, or show me a picture of my funeral or something."

"Ah." Graelyn said.

"So, one of your agents has fallen into Nazi hands?" Graelyn nodded. FDR rubbed his forehead.

"Do you know where?" She shook her head. "What's he look like? What's his name?"

"Well, he's entirely coated in armor that acts like TV screens-" a knowing look came into FDR's eyes, and she stopped. He picked up his phone.

"Bring the file on the Machine-Man in here immediately."

"Ah." She said again, maybe this would be easier than she thought.

"We were already planning on sending a mission there, an airdrop."

"Could I request Dave Barker be a pilot on the mission." FDR picked up the cigarette, and puffed it. The smoke was noxious, and clearly filled with carcinogens. Graelyn scrunched her nose up.

"I suppose so. We'll simply add you to the mission roster. Let you take care of your business." She nodded.

"I do have one more question, sir." He gestured with the cigarette for her to continue. She noted he was mainly using that arm. "Why did you inter the Americans of Japanese heritage during this war?" He

puffed, and his face lowered so his glasses were white ovals of light.

“You have to do these things in times of war.”

“I mean, do you?” Graelyn pondered.

“If the people aren't secure, you can't have a people.” That had seemed true to her for so long. Her mother had weaned her on that. If she could be stronger than other people, she was free. If she could have something to ruin them, some security like Arch's offswitch code, no one could hurt her.

Said the people who hurt her. She felt a bit dizzy, but she asked the next question.

“But if you treat your own people like they are your enemy, if you hurt your friends to show your other friends you are strong and that people who like hurting the innocent won't hurt them while you're hurting the innocent, isn't that kind of messed up?” She decided that might be too colloquial, and added, “Doesn't that sink you from the moral high ground?”

He looked up at her, “I take it that decision is not remembered well.”

“Only by those who look for excuses to hurt the innocent while looking like saints.”

He nodded, and they sat in silence. After a few minutes, he gestured for her to leave, and she did so.

The next day, she was on a plane to Europe.

Graelyn sat in the cockpit with Dave Barker. She was wearing her spacesuit, which kept her totally warm, everyone else was wearing thick jackets and breath masks. They'd be dropping by parachute just outside the compound, and working their way in. The Nazis were being pushed back towards Berlin, so she had no idea how many people would still be guarding this base, but hopefully not many. They flew through the clouds, and started to descend to the altitude they would drop from. Dave gestured to her, and she saluted, and made her way back, leaving a folder on her seat. She hadn't given him much info, but damn it, he deserved to know something.

“Agent Scythes,” The ground commander Captain Noble said, “are you ready to jump?” Graelyn nodded, her parachute was already on her back. They waited till they were in position, and then a door in the side of the plane slid open. One by one they jumped into the darkness.

*“I'm coming Arch.”* She thought. *“I'm not leaving you behind.”*

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“Ah, you're finally awake.” Said the man in the black uniform with the scarred face. “My name is Doctor Heisman, do you know who I am?” The machine man nodded.

“You asked me that yesterday.” Archimedes said. “And the day before.”

“Just seeing how you are managing to cope without food and water.” He didn't tell them he had internal stores of both, and that he was operating in low-power mode anyways. They still worked at least, not like some of his systems.

“And what, pray tell, is that?” Heisman said, gesturing to the deactivate orb. When they'd landed in that field in Germany, it had switched off. The impact maybe? Maybe it had lost its connection with its masters? Maybe he'd just pulled on the right thing in its insides.

“Its a modern art piece I made, its fractures represent your fragile masculinity and constant need for affirmation.” The doctor's eye twitched, and picked up the crowbar. Angrily, he smacked Arch in the

head with it. Once, twice, three times, ten times, twenty times... The cracks on his helmet where they had been focusing their blows grew.

“Where do you come from?”

“Space.” Smack.

“Who sent you here?”

“Your mother to tell you how disappointed in you she is.” Smack.

“Someday I will just kill you, and figure out how you work.”

“I'll just explode if you do that, so that will be fun for both of us.” He wasn't even lying. Arch had been trying to keep doctor Heisman busy. When he tried to get information out of Arch, who was shackled up against the wall with exceedingly thick chains and manacles, he forgot to experiment on the twins, and that was something Arch would take as much pain as possible to prevent. Luckily for Arch, he could turn his pain receptors off. He was fairly certain he had a skull fracture right now, but he didn't feel it. Occasionally, the doctor and his aides would try to look through the gashes in his sides the Orb had made. They didn't know what they were looking at, luckily. They also tried to look inside the Orb, and Arch secretly wished they'd accidentally activate the thing again. The twins were huddled together, or their equivalent of that when the Nazis were in the room, which was to sit together with their arms touching. Their heads were shaved, and they looked ill. From what the guards had said, these weren't the first set of twins they'd had in the building. From when he'd spoken to them when they were alone, he'd learned they were named Lala and Mirela, and were from a group of people called the Romani. He tried to give them a reassuring look, but wasn't sure he could in his current state. His carapace flared with broken images. The doctor stepped back, in sudden awe. Then one of the side doors burst open.

“Sir,” a Nazi guard said, running into the room, “We've been found.”

“What do you mean we've been found? This base is buried inside a mountain.” The guard was sweating.

“Sir, I mean there is a girl and a group of Allied soldiers. She has some device that is opening all of our doors.” The doctor gestured with his crowbar.

“That's impossible!”

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Corporal Halsey took out the last of the guards in the room as Graelyn ran to the next door, tablet in hand.

“I still can't believe what you're doing.” Captain Noble said. Graelyn shrugged.

“It's just an app. I downloaded it for fun a few years ago.” Old mechanical locks like this were nothing when you could just move all the parts around the electro magnet in her tablet. She didn't even have to do anything, she just put her tablet up to the lock and pressed the button.

“What's that on your.... Screen?” Noble asked.

“Oh! That's a yogurt ad. It's a free app, so, you know, it gets supported by ads.” He nodded, clearly not entirely understanding.

“Right.”

“Ope, all done.”

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Doctor Heisman was nervous. This wasn't supposed to happen. He had security, damn it, and they were supposed to stop things like this from happening. The allies couldn't possibly be able to manipulate locks, dead bolt seals... They couldn't! But they were, so now was no time to question it. He looked at his experiments. The twins, the machine-man, the orb. He gritted his teeth.

“We need to get rid of the evidence. Especially the other twins.” The remaining guards had entered the room.

“We need to prepare for a stand sir!” Said the captain of the guard.

“No, we need to-” They were cut off, as main doors to the chamber flew open, and a group of Allied troops including of all things a Russian teenager ran into the room. She held a black rectangle, they held rifles. The guards who raised their guns were picked off, swift shots to the head by trained marksmen. After this, the smart ones dropped their weapons. The teenager ran over to the machine man, and stroked his face.

“Oh God Arch, look what they did to you...” There were holes in his sides, and electric shock devices had been stuck in there. She carefully began to unclip them and pull them off. Doctor Heisman tried to flee, but was tackled by an Allied soldier, who gave him a rifle butt to the face.

“Jesus,” one of the soldiers said, kneeling by the twins, “sir, these are just kids over here.” The surviving Nazis were disarmed, and cordoned off in a corner of the room with armed guards, while the rest of the squad began to look through it. A medic began attending to the two children.

“I'm alright, Grae.” Arch said, his voice was modulated and distorted. His carapace flickered as he spoke.

“No, you really aren't.” She moved her hands along his injuries, “How bad do your damage sensors say it is?”

“...Well a lot of those are broken.” Graelyn shook her head, doing her best to patch him together how little she could.

“Why did you save me Arch? I should have been the one in chains. I tripped, I...”

“You're my friend.” She wanted to argue, she really did, but she just nodded. The Captain tapped her on the shoulder.

“Agent Scythes, when you have the time we found a locked door we can't open.” She nodded, and examining Arch's chains, pulled the blowtorch out of her bag.

“Ma'am, I think those chains are too thick for a blowtorch.” She wanted to say, “Not one from the future.” But she just gave him a sly grin, and did them in.

“Will you be okay Arch?” He tried to stand up, but couldn't.

“I'll just rest for a bit.” She reached out to put her hand on his shoulder, but pulled it back.

“I'll be right back.” The Captain led her to the door he'd spoken of, and she passed the twins who were slowly trying to eat some soup while a group of soldiers tended to them.

“Are those kids okay?” Graelyn whispered to the Captain. He shook his head.

“From what we've gathered their parents are dead, and the Nazis have been doing experiments on them.” Graelyn's eyes widened.

“You can't be serious.”

“I'm afraid I am, ma'am.” She looked at the kids. One of the soldiers was singing them a silly song. She looked at the marks on their bodies that weren't even hidden. She thought of her mother, and how this made that look like a cakewalk. She felt fire rise inside her. She looked back at the Nazis in the corner. It had been 500 years since the Nazis when she was born. They were boogeymen, evil phantoms of the past. Now they were all too real to her. It was like the version of them in her mind was one of a cartoon, and here in front of her was the real effects of it: starving, beaten, tortured children. She was all too aware this was real now, and her skin quaked. She shook her head, and lowered her tablet to the door. She activated the app. The little loading icon appeared, and then a big red X appeared “Lock damaged internally! Can't unlock!” That's wasn't normal. She felt the door around the edges: it had been melted shut into its frame. What was so important they would bother doing that, hastily and shoddily even, instead of leaving? Graelyn pulled out her blowtorch, and began to work around the edges. When she finished, she waited for the door to cool down, and then tested it to see if it moved on its hinges. It did. She smiled at the captain.

“You don't mind if I do the honors, Captain Noble?” He shook his head.

“All yours, Agent Scythes.” She tugged the heavy door open a crack, and slipped through.

There was a moment where no one could see Graelyn and the room was silent aside from the soldiers trying to cheer up the children. Then she walked back into the room, her tablet hanging loosely from her hand, then clattering to the floor. She shook gently, her eyes wide and full of lines of red. She nearly stumbled over and put her arm against the wall.

“Agent Scythes what—” Agent Noble began, but she interrupted him. She threw up, keeling over to her knees, still shaking. Arch looked worried, and tried to get up, but couldn't. Noble hurried over and put a hand on her. “What's wrong?” She looked up, her eyes boiling over, tears running down her face, and her hand reaching for the Captain's sidearm.

“Give me that.”

“Ma'am, you said you didn't want a gun when—”

“I know what I said. Give it to me.” She whispered. Hesitantly. He handed her the gun. She staggered over to the Nazi prisoners, the Allied guards eyed her warily as she approached.

“What did you see in there, Scythes?” Noble called, but she just kept walking.

“You. You did that.” She looked at the scientists, doctor Heisman in particular.

“I.. How could you I..” She began gagging again, and threw up a second time. She staggered up and pointed the gun at them. Noble ran after her, holding his hands up and getting up along side her.

“Hold up Graelyn, don't do anything hasty.”

“No this isn't hasty. This—Captain, you don't want to see what's in there I promise you.”

“There's nothing that could provoke you killing these people.” She looked at him like she had seen hell.

“Okay then, tell me what you saw. Lets be reasonable about this.”

“There is nothing reasonable in that room, reason is the opposite of what is in that room...” Her eyes welled up again with tears, “there are bodies in there sir. Children's bodies. Twins. Dozens of them...” She backed up, losing her breath, supporting herself on the wall again for a moment before raising the gun again and gesturing towards the prisoners. “And they weren't just dead they were... Desecrated.



You can't even imagine. You don't want to see it. I want to unsee it. How could you do that? To other human beings? What kind of person would you have to be?"

She saw the room where her other self had cut into Johnathan.

"What kind of monster?"

"We were just following Heisman's orders!" One of them yelled, pointing at the doctor, "Please!"

"Just following orders?" Graelyn's voice was loud enough to echo through the building.

"JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS? There is no order that could justify that." Graelyn walked towards the doctor, and placed the gun against the doctor's head. "I should shoot you right now. You deserve it." She waited for him to reply.

"They aren't real people." He finally said. Her finger tightened a little on the trigger. She imagined she pulled the trigger. His brains blowing out the back of his head. She needed to kill him. He deserved it.

*What kind of person doesn't fall?*

She thought of Arch, and how he didn't kill Manuel, even when he could have. She thought of herself, in Songbird's world, and her crimes against humanity. That wasn't the real her. She knew that, deep inside. She wasn't a monster. She had to not be a monster. She wouldn't descend to their level. She wouldn't meet this injustice with terrified bloodshed. She took a deep breath, and lowered the gun, stepping back.

"Captain, please relieve me of this firearm." He nodded, and took it from her palm. Graelyn slumped to her knees she looked doctor Heisman in the eyes.

"After this war there will be a trial, and you will be hung." He scoffed. "I'm not showing you mercy. I'm showing you justice, and the world will see what you did here. Its not my job to punish you. Your victims will get to speak out against you, and you will crumble under their voice." She got up, feeling weak, and went back over to Arch, she slumped down on the wall next to him.

"You did the right thing." She rubbed her eyes.

"I'm not sure I did."

"You're not a monster, Graelyn." She nodded. They sat in silence. She reached over, and held his hand.

"We can't dally here, we need to get you to a place you can be repaired, and get the orb to a place someone can use it to prepare." Arch nodded, as much as he could.

"What if that was the same place?" Graelyn raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that Heirum J. Whitehead guy owned a tech company right? Maybe he can do what we need." Graelyn mulled it over. It wasn't a bad plan, really.

"So there would be a big tech company working on a way to fight the Council for a few hundred years. That sounds like exactly what we're looking for."

"If that's so, how do we get there?" Graelyn looked over at the broken orb.

"I'll just have to fiddle."

As Graelyn went over to the Orb, the twins came over to Arch.

"Hey, how are you guys feeling?" He said, fuzzily.

"How are you feeling?" Mirela replied.

"I asked first."

"Terrible, but better." Lala answered.

"Same here. But you kids, you've got to stick together. You're family, that means something."

"Its just us though...." Mirela said softly. Arch nodded, and then gestured to the Captain.

"What is it? You feeling alright?" Noble said squatting down.

"I'm fine. But we're going to have to leave here and I need to know these kids will be taken care of after the war, whatever that means." Noble nodded, and smiled at the girls.

"I'll keep track of them. We'll make sure they're provided for." Arch felt something shift inside him, and was glad he'd turned his pain of... But it was still terrifying even so, and if the system broke that turned off the pain...

"I'm glad to hear that captain."

Graelyn fiddled. Cursing she reached in, pulled out two cords that resembled the tendrils on the Pantheon alien she'd met before, and with a disgruntled sigh pushed them onto her temples, closing her eyes and waiting for the inevitable mental battle. She scrunched her eyes up, and steeled herself.

"Please input a command!" A voice in her head thought.

"Oh thank God for once this is easy."

The orb roared to life, its carapace lighting up in crystalline cracks and swirls. Graelyn thought about the date she needed to go to, and the Orb lit up.

"Warning: systems damaged."

"Can you manage one more trip?"

"Systems will focus on procuring one more time-space jaunt. Further uses may result in complete atomic breakdown of the nearby area." She sighed, one more hop it is.

"Arch, are you ready to go?" He nodded, and with the help of the soldiers, moved him over to the orb. Captain Noble took off his hat, and rubbed his scalp.

"So, what exactly are you going to be doing with... Whatever that is?"

"Tear a hole in reality in order to hop over to the future to prevent a future invasion from an alternate dimension." He opened his mouth, but kept his teeth closed. "You'll be fine, its over half a milenia in the future. Anyways we're trying to stop it." She looked over at Arch. He really didn't look in good shape. "You holding together?"

"My pain inhibitors are breaking down.

"Ah." She said, and picked up the neural link cords.

"You might want to step back guys, we're about to do wonders." They did. "Good knowing you guys, Captain, troops, twins." She saluted. They all did to, well, the twins waved. Arch weakly waved back. Graelyn plugged herself into the orb, and its spiky limbs sprung to life, weaving a portal of blue light, and tearing a hole in the world that they dove through, leaving behind yet another past.

\* \* \* \*

Doctor Heisman was led to the gallows after his conviction. Captain Noble, and his unit, as well as a pair of Romani twins he'd apparently adopted had given unflinching testimony. The conviction was

unquestionable. He tried to keep his head up as they put the noose around his neck. Someday, he thought, white people will rule this world with the lesser races in their place, and I will be remembered as a hero. He dropped. It wasn't quick.

His feet turned gently in the breeze. After some time, his left shoe fell off.

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“It’s not working right!” Graelyn screamed, banging on the side of the orb. Arch could only weakly nod. They shifted and jinked, falling this way and that, and then a white hole opened up below them, and they crashed and rolled onto the ground. Graelyn tumbled, her suit absorbing her impact, mostly, as she came to a stop next to a chunk of concrete. Arch fell like a rag doll, and stopped, unmoving. This was absolutely not what was supposed to happen. Graelyn rose to her feet, and looked at the sky: it was filled with strange vessels, some of them raining what looked like molten gold down on the city below. The city burned. She looked back at Arch, and seeing him unmoving ran to his side.

“Come on Arch, don’t give up now, come on...” She shook him gently, and he moaned. “Oh thank God...” She inspected his form, but wasn’t sure what she needed to do. His anatomy was so different! “I’ll be right back Arch, I’m going to find some help.” Graelyn scampered up, her head was still dizzy from the landing, but she couldn’t wait. She ran across the scorched earth, and came up to the crest of the hill. A sign in Cyrillic said the date:

“Come ring in the new year with Centro News! 2496 is right at your finger tips!”

“Oh no.” Graelyn whispered, as she watched a skyscraper tumble onto the streets below. “This is Moscow. We’re too late. We’re too late.”

*Next week, we'll be back with a bonus story, as well as the week after.*

*Then, in three weeks time be ready for the final dramatic chapters of 10,000 Dawns: Serial! Dropping all at once, with bonus features! Get ready, its going to be good...*