

# REMEMBRANCE

*Saving time.*

BY MELANIE REES

“A long time ago, war was simple,” I tell the computer.

“No war is simple,” replies Patti.

“Simpler,” I clarify. My jittery fingers type the longitude, latitude and precise date. “And I guess the definition of ‘a long time ago’ is meaningless now.”

“It doesn’t change the job, however you look at it,” says Patti with mannered pitch and tone too nice to be real. I’m sure Perpetual Analytics researched phonetics to ensure the time-travel interface sounded that benevolent.

I transmit the weapons sequence to the drone. “Guildford’s Portal opening.”

“Confirmed.”

Across the other side of the laboratory, in its clear bubble insulated from all else, the drone hovers above the shimmering shards of energy.

“Engaging.” I press the button and it vanishes from sight.

White beaches, shrubby cliffs, tracks and trenches flicker onto my computer screen.

I turn down the volume, blocking out the bombardment of enemy gunfire. One of those bullets might’ve been the one that hit my great-grandfather.

Across the beaches, men and boys scramble. And fall. From the height of the drone’s camera, I could convince myself they’re ants.

But ants don’t bleed like that.

Beyond them, the target is clear. The drone zooms in on the frightened faces of the Central Forces.

“I am saving tens of thousands of lives by killing others.” Saying it aloud helps convince me.

“You are not killing,” Patti chimes, as if talking about the weather. “You are pressing a button.”

Was that scripted or Patti’s own reasoning breaking through?

Sure, I’m not killing. But, this war was over. A fair, untainted battle. The outcome already decided more than a century ago.

“My analysis suggests this moral win so early on could prevent the Second World War and the Holocaust. Potential lives saved are no longer just thousands on the beaches but millions.”

There it is; the computer’s pep talk.

I inhale and press the button. The small missile shoots from the drone. Fire engulfs the opposing troops until the drone’s images vanish.



I sit at my computer terminal. Confusion wracks my brain for a second. “What happened?”

“The drone annihilated the enemy on Gallipoli.” Patti projects images of my last mission. “You saved thousands of lives, including your great-grandfather’s.”

I can’t help but notice the way Patti emphasizes that the drone *killed* lives, but I *saved* lives.

“In the original timeline your great-grandfather died on the beaches.”

“Really?” Just last ANZAC Day dawn service, I was telling my young boy, Mickey, how brave my great-grandfather was as he ran into the enemy’s trenches, and how the Unknown Soldier burned them all.

Was that me?

“Do you fight like that? Is it scary?” my son had asked.

“Not exactly. My fighting is safe.” It’s the best reply I can muster, but it doesn’t feel honest somehow.

“We just need some minor adjustments.”

Patti brings me back to reality. “My analysis has selected specific individuals to target,” it says as if about to recite a shopping list. “This time we may be able to prevent the Holocaust.”

Names, dates, coordinates. Data filter across my screen. Not data. People. My stomach churns.

“I showed your medal at show and tell. The teacher said you’re a hero,” Mickey had said the other day.

Hero? The word grinds in my guts. If I stopped a world war this way, how much of a hero would I really be?

I rest my head in my hands, and spot a note with date and coordinates in my handwriting. I set the program.

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“Guildford’s Portal engaging.”

The drone hovers and vanishes. Images

of a messy laboratory stream onto my screen. Strewn across a desk are pages and pages of calculations. Alongside an old-fashioned desktop, a guttural snore erupts from underneath a tangled mess of grey hair.

“Is this the right time?” asks Patti.

I recognize those calculations. “Yes. We are at the right place.” The drone hums and projects a compilation of video footage onto the old man’s laboratory wall.

Sir Guildford grunts and raises his head a fraction. “What the heck,” he mutters still half-dazed.

Watching the blood and fire of men up close rips my heart from my chest. All those histories written and rewritten. All those men falling, who never should’ve fallen. I pray Sir Guildford is as affected as I am.

He looks at his computer calculations and then at the advanced drone.

“It is for the best,” says my drone to the old man.

“Why is the drone talking?” asks Patti.

“I think I programmed it in another past. Doesn’t it sound benevolent?”

“Step aside,” says the drone.

I press a few buttons and the small missile whirrs as it aims at his work desk.

Sir Guildford backs away from his chair, glances at the drone, and then runs from the room.

I guess I’ll never remember this, my great-grandfather will die young, my son may never call me a hero, but at least I can feel like one if just for this small moment in time.

I press the ignition button and fire engulfs the room.

I stand on the white beach with Mickey perched on my shoulders. Dawn bathes the crowd of people in a warm orange glow.

“Is this where your great-grandfather died?” Mickey asks.

“Yes.”

A memory niggles in my head. The thought grows heavy, but the weight of it dissipates as the bugle breaks the silence.

An official speaker recites the ode into the microphone. Silence falls across the beach.

“... At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them,” he finishes.

That must be all I was trying to recollect. I will remember them. ■

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