

[Draft – obviously!]

## Leading into the Digital Dark

*“Science and technology revolutionize our lives, but memory, tradition and myth frame our response.” - Arthur M. Schlesinger*

When historians weave their account of past events, they often create narratives of causation – where one individual or group’s actions led to larger scale reactions and so-on. Even with natural disasters, rarely is the incident recounted in a way to claim it was an act of the divine. Rather, the language of science is brought in to explain what led to those tragic events, be it tectonic plates, global warming, or another phenomenon. I expect no less from mankind when they attempt to process and record this new era. Surely the history books will lay the blame for this global shift at the feet of some undesirable group, and praise those in power as the ones to bring about calm during a time of uncertainty.

It is my deepest hope, dear reader, that I do not succumb to that line of behavior. The reality is that no one truly knows what led to the Digital Dark Age. If anyone had a hand in its catalyst, those individuals are either dead or good at keeping secrets. Rather than speculate on the “who” or the “why”, I shall share with you the “what” and “how”: what has changed, and how Humanity and Remnants have adjusted to Reality’s initial unraveling.

To clarify, the start of the Digital Dark Age was not a singular event, but rather an extended period where mankind’s relationship with technology started to erode. The first era, which some call The Digital Twilight, gave the first telltale signs that Reality was starting to become undone. Something within our souls changed so that our basest emotions wreaked havoc upon the technology that we built. Hunger-fueled anxiety and depression could cause lights to dim, and fear for one’s survival – especially when physically threatened – could cause anything from power outages to vehicles stopping in their tracks. Fortunately, these glitches were temporary. Humanity’s response to such a cosmic warning was typical – one of simultaneous adaptation and denial. It wasn’t until the watershed event, the mysterious loss of the Internet and long-distance data transfer technology, that mankind on a global scale recognized that something catastrophic had occurred.

### The Digital Twilight: December 21, 2012

New Age writers placed a lot of significance on the date December 21, 2012. The date was believed to correspond with the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> b’ak’tun, a measure of time in the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar. If you don’t know what that is, go online and look it up on W- wait, silly me, that’s no longer an option. Let’s just say that it’s a calendaring system from the time before the Americas were colonized.

Some saw that date as the potential end of the world. Others saw it as the start of a new era for mankind. I have yet to see anything that confirms that the Mayans believed that something significant was anticipated to happen on that date, but that hasn't stopped others from placing their belief in that date. In a world full of anxiety and despair, concentrated hope is a powerful force. If it turns out that's the case – that hope focused on a single day could alter the fabric of reality – I have a few old friends that I plan to seek out to test that theory.

### The Pulse Phenomenon

What differentiated the Digital Twilight from the time before is an anomaly that has come to be labeled the Pulse Phenomenon. At some point in the final weeks of 2012, technology started to glitch or outright break down at an accelerated rate. While older machines – ones that ran exclusively on combustion or steam power – were occasionally impacted, electronic equipment was greatly affected.

In the summer of 2013, researchers at Northwestern University found a correlation between an individual's level of stress and the likelihood that technology will glitch around them. Studies were performed later that year to try to determine whether different types of stress have a greater impact on technology. The answer to that puzzle was found in an academic thesis in early 2014. Salwah Murad, doctoral candidate at John Hopkins University, presented research that concluded that stress based on physical and safety needs has a higher impact on technology than stress based on social or self-esteem issues. The cause of this anomaly, per now-Dr. Murad's research and testing, was that humans had started emitting electromagnetic pulses, and that the intensity of those pulses increased when a person was under duress. This finding is what coined the term "Pulse Phenomenon."

Numerous humanitarian and civil rights groups lauded Dr. Murad's work and cited her research as a reason to provide additional support to impoverished areas. They pointed to the Pulse Phenomenon as physical evidence of the cycle of poverty, as those who were in need were more likely to have critical technology – like transportation – fail on them and put them in a position where they were unable to work. Further, activists noted that the technological malady had the risk of becoming widespread and affecting the lives and livelihoods of those who were just slightly better off.

Lobbyists and fiscally conservative groups pushed back, naturally. At least one politician was quoted saying, "Poor people should not spend their money on tech toys to begin with", never mind that such so-called tech toys included things like a working refrigerator. Some far-right media celebrities attempted to discredit Dr. Murad by making ad-hominem attacks because she was an immigrant, Muslim, and a woman. Others hinted that she was secretly an agent for the Daesh and that her "so-called research" was meant to pit America's political factions against each other. Some of the more religiously devout alternated between claiming that the Pulse Phenomenon was God's punishment for the lazy or God's gift to free mankind from the false idols of technology.

The years that followed saw the socioeconomic divide widen. The rich and ultra-elite were sheltered from most of the effects. The stress that they endured on a day-to-day basis was minimal and scope, and often could be handled discreetly through medication, prescription or otherwise. Those within the middle class started to isolate themselves from their lower-class peers out of a sense of self preservation. Those who were down on their luck for an extended period of time or who faced chronic illness became pariahs, as few wanted to reach out and support them out of the risk of their own technology and livelihoods being impacted. Those who fell within the lower classes of society banded together as a community for security. To them, looking out for one another became a tool of self-preservation. If their neighbor had a full belly, enough medicine, and felt safe, that neighbor was less likely to cause a bus to break down from their personal stress.

One perceived benefit of the Pulse Phenomenon was a decrease in violent gun use. Despite being operated on combustion rather than electricity, firearms were affected and ceased to function when the wielder was under stress. Inner city areas saw a sharp decrease in police presence, as officers became hesitant of going to areas where their weapons no longer functioned. City budgets were reorganized to place police officers in more affluent areas - where their means of law enforcement were more effective – which led to impoverished communities turning to self-policing. Carrying weaponry such as pipes, knives, bats, and swords became commonplace, and children as young as 5 were taught the basics of self-defense.

### The Surveillance State

While many viewed the Pulse Phenomenon as a curse, Remnants considered it to be a boon to our survival. Previously, one of the telltale signs that an individual was a Remnant was that technology would break around them. Now that humans also experienced that problem, we could better blend in with our brethren, making it difficult for Keepers to track us within an urban environment. Some activists saw the Pulse Phenomenon as a tool to bring about greater awareness of social issues and to push for change. Having large crowds of inner-city protesters flood the streets of a business district during a weekday could bring that area down, both in blocking the major thoroughfares as well as causing electronic devices to malfunction or break down completely

To combat the weaponized use of the technological anomaly without acknowledging how the Pulse Phenomenon disproportionately impacted lower-class citizens, local and federal lawmakers sought to find ways to creatively skirt around First and Fourth Amendment rights under the guise of security and public welfare. Some government agencies tapped the expertise of major technology and software companies in order to monitor its citizens, placate potential uprisings, and target potential aggressors. Many of these projects were either financially backed or influenced by the Keepers, as they saw such endeavors as a way to identify, capture, and subjugate those Remnants who still dwelled openly among Humanity.

### *Operation Stingray*

Shortly after the start of the Digital Twilight, various law enforcement agencies partnered with *[TBD Company Name Here]* to leverage a new type of surveillance tool: International Mobile Subscriber Identity (IMSI) Catchers, otherwise known as a Stingrays. In order to provide said agencies with plausible deniability, *[Company Name Here]* required the use of non-disclosure agreements between itself and law enforcement officials, so that information about the Stingray technology could not be easily accessible to the public, especially the press. Further, protocols were set up so that police usage of such technology could be kept secret from defendants in criminal cases, and for federal agents to be able to seize surveillance records to prevent them from being used in court.

While a few police officer-led press conferences attempted to assure the general public that Stingray technology was only being used to track offenders in criminal cases, hacktivists leaked information showing otherwise. Data released to various press organizations showed not only that the Stingrays were being used to gather content transmitted from cell phones, track user locations, or create a widespread denial of service attack, but that the devices were disproportionately placed in marginalized communities. Further, it was discovered that the technology used within the Stingray devices was somehow immune (or at least resistant to) the effects of the Pulse Phenomenon, as there were records indicating that Stingray devices maintained functionality even when a neighborhood was experiencing a technology blackout. Government officials denied such accusations, and defended the high usage of Stingrays in poverty-stricken areas because the Pulse Phenomenon meant there was a higher likelihood that surveillance devices would malfunction, and they wanted to have backups set up in case of such an event.

### *Big Data, Big Brother*

As Remnants - especially those whose Tether to Reality was strong enough to where they could reasonably pass as human - left the safety of the Sanctuaries in order to live among mankind, Keepers sought different means to identify and isolate their chosen prey. Using marketing companies as front, Keepers leveraged social media platforms in order to try and ferret out Remnants who had integrated into modern society. In the mid 2010's, social media users saw a boom of inane personality quizzes and other sharable memes that beckoned individual participation.

What individual users were unaware of was that, upon participating, these third-party websites gained access to the most intimate details of one's online persona. Some of these games also subtly introduced malware to the individual's computer, which opened additional access to personal information. For every major security breach that reached the media, there were dozens, if not hundreds of smaller programs that worked their way through firewalls and antivirus security measures.

The near-limitless access to personal information not only helped Keepers find and Subjugate many of our brothers and sisters, but it provided the Keepers with an additional weapon to use against us. Much like the human police use predictive modeling to anticipate areas where a crime was about to take place, Keepers used the information that they gathered to predict who might Manifest as a Remnant and intercepted those individuals before we had a chance to find and rescue them.

### *The Sidereal Exodus*

The Keepers hit us where it hurt. By hunting down our Voices, the Keepers hindered our ability to send communications between Sanctuaries without the use of technology. When they targeted our Legacies, they removed our ability to bargain with the Universe for assistance in times of need. By extinguishing our Dragonkin, the Keepers took away our ability to delve into the past to uncover hidden truths, and to peek forward in time to see potential futures.

The Remnants who sought to live outside of Sanctuaries came home, though fewer in number. Our scouts became hesitant to venture forth, even if it meant seeking out and saving the lives of the newly Manifested. We worked to become as self-sufficient as possible within our Sanctuary spaces, taking up farming, herding, and various trade crafts so that we would not be dependent on the outside world for support. Some felt it was only a matter of time before the Keepers found a way to pierce the veil that kept the Sidereal spaces hidden from their eyes.

### *Aside: The Fate of Salwah Murad*

At the time that Salwah Murad discovered the anomaly that caused human stress to negatively impact technology, she saw herself as human. She was unaware of the existence of Remnants, or that she was on the verge of Manifestation herself.

Salwah discovered her true self on March 20, 2015 when she was in the town of Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands in order to witness the solar eclipse. If you believe the stories, Salwah looked skywards at the point of totality, and at that moment the calling of one of the Covenants filled her mind.

Few Technologists ever had the tenacity or depth of skill that Salwah presented. Her skills rivaled those of seasoned Prodigies, which led many to assume that she too was among those who sought to maintain the Covenant of Man. Salwah kept her Archetype to herself, and her Tether was strong enough that she never showed the telltale signs of the Covenant that she was truly aligned with.

The last time that Salwah was seen was the day before the 2017 full solar eclipse. Those who saw her in her home sanctuary noticed that she appeared agitated, almost frantic. Initially, some wondered if she was aware of the implications of the solar eclipse and the oncoming Digital Dark Age and went into hiding. Salwah left no written notes, and her research is locked in husks

of computers that ceased working years ago. If anyone could access and decrypt that information, they may uncover the truth about Dr. Murad's whereabouts, and why she left right before the dawn of the Digital Dark Age.