

# Strikeforce

By David Meadows & Friends

## Chapter Three: Time's Past

- ❖ In the year 2350, scientists have discovered that a hole in time has manifested in 1987 and is rapidly expanding through the centuries.
- ❖ Nightflyer, Scorpio, Avatar, Electron and Black Swan are 24th-century law-enforcement officers with abilities far above baseline humans.
- ❖ Together, they have travelled into their past to save their present.
- ❖ I am a model GM-1 Intelligence Matrix with  $10^{18}$  parallel neural nodes and a data storage of 107 petabytes. I will accompany the officers.

- ❖ 4 November 1987.
- ❖ High Earth orbit.

Twenty-two thousand miles above the Earth, the space station formerly designated 'Watchstation-17' blinked into existence. It rotated lazily on its own axis, a compact, conical shape, its smooth lines broken only by the sleek orbital re-entry shuttle nestling against its side. Complex electromagnetic fields reached outwards, cloaking the station from any prying sensors on the planet far below.

On the station's command deck, the five crewmembers were seated at the central table. Anticipation hung in the air.

'Are we there yet?' asked Electron.

'Confirmed,' replied the station's Computer in its mechanical monotone. 'Time jump is complete.'

'Wow,' was all Electron could say.

The five police officers left their seats and moved efficiently into their carefully-rehearsed positions at the monitor stations that lined the command deck's walls.

'Never doubted it for a minute,' said Nightflyer.

Scorpio didn't waste words on quips. 'Computer, tie us into their Internet,' he commanded.

'Working,' said the Computer. And then, a second later: 'Their worldwide network coverage is fragmented and incomplete. I can find no useful data feeds.' Then, after another short pause: 'However, I can offer you a choice of seven hundred and fifty-three television channels.'

'Uh ... no thanks,' said Scorpio. But Black Swan had other ideas.

'It's still a news source and might point to the anomaly we're looking for. Electron and Avatar can be on television duty, I'll check the astronomical data,' she said.

Electron leaned over to Avatar and whispered, 'Who died and put her in charge?'

'Somebody died?' cried Avatar, aghast.

'It was a figure of speech! Sheesh!' Electron made a mental note to avoid joking with Avatar. The self-proclaimed demon's inexperience with human culture sometimes led to him taking things too literally.

Time passed. Somewhere, down there on the planet below, some kind of spatial anomaly was about to start eating away at time itself. But they were looking for a proverbial needle in a haystack, complicated

by the fact that they didn't know what the needle might look like. They scanned news reports, data feeds, the station's sensor readings—everything that might give them some clue.

'Information: forty-five minutes until the end of the world,' the Computer intoned helpfully.

'We really didn't need to know that,' muttered Nightflyer while he gazed futilely at a set of earthquake measurement statistics he barely understood. What exactly did the end of the world look like?

Even the Computer's massive data-crunching ability failed to find anything it deemed worthy of bringing to the crew's attention. Until ...

'Information: high-power tachyon anomaly detected. Visual representation on main screen now.'

The main wall screen flickered to life, showing the Earth's surface. The officers recognised the North American Administrative District, and knew from their briefings that in this century it was known as the United States. From a spot in the state of Arizona, a glowing beam of light shot up and out into deep space.

'Invisible tachyons are displayed in false colour to enable visual representation,' the Computer explained helpfully.

'Do they have the technology to manipulate a beam like that in this century?' asked Scorpio.

'We barely have the technology to manipulate a beam like that!' exclaimed Black Swan, fascinated. 'The question is, are they projecting it or receiving it? Computer, calculate the beam's other endpoint.'

'Working. Beam terminus is deep-space x-ray source designated Cygnus X-1.'

'Oh no,' breathed Black Swan. 'Cygnus X-1 is a black hole. Space-time breaks down at a black hole's event horizon.' She looked around at her crewmates and spoke slowly for emphasis. 'Space and *time*.'

'But what is the beam actually doing?' asked Scorpio.

'I ... don't know.' Black Swan always hated to admit ignorance, but this was beyond anything known to 24th-century science. 'But whatever it's doing, it's something that *shouldn't* be happening.'

Nightflyer was already leaping towards the teleport platform. 'That's good enough for me. Computer, set teleport to the beam's terminus on Earth.'

'Teleport system is unavailable,' said the Computer.

'What?' squeaked Nightflyer, voicing the momentary panic that they all felt.

'Now we feel really silly,' Electron remarked, his humour falling like a lead balloon in the strained atmosphere.

'Teleport calibration is taking longer than anticipated due to the absence of sensory data from a full Watchstation network. I may be able to establish a beam lock in another fifty-three minutes,' the Computer intoned. Then added, almost cruelly, 'Thirty-seven minutes until the end of the world.'

Nightflyer was already moving towards one of the deck hatches. 'Shuttle!' he shouted. 'Computer, prep the shuttle for immediate undocking.'

'Confirmed.'

The others followed Nightflyer, but Scorpio hung back for a private word with Black Swan.

'Cygnus is "the swan", isn't it?'

Black Swan shrugged and moved through the hatch. She wasn't about to tell anyone the connection between Cygnus X-1 and her own powers. Well, she reasoned to herself, there was no connection between that event in the future and this one here. Was there?

The five officers were soon in the cramped forward cabin of the space shuttle. The small, delta-winged aerospace vehicles were rarely used in the 24th century where routine orbit-to-ground travel was by teleport beam. There had been some debate over whether it was necessary to send one back in time at all, with Professor Zod arguing that its added mass was an unnecessary drain on the power plant during time travel—but the officers were now immensely grateful he had lost that argument.

'Who has a pilot's certification?' asked Scorpio. There was silence.

'They sent us into the past with a shuttle and no pilot?' he asked, annoyed mostly at himself for not bringing the question up during their briefings.

'I'll give it a go,' said Nightflyer, buckling himself into one of the front seats.

'You'll *give it a go?*' asked Electron, appalled.

'Do you have any flight experience?' asked Scorpio.

'Not on anything like this,' admitted Nightflyer. His hand hovered over a bank of switches and he chewed his lip. 'But how hard can it be?' he muttered to himself.

Scorpio took the other front seat. 'The Computer can pilot us down,' he said.

'Confirmed.'

'I can do it!' insisted the ever-optimistic Nightflyer.

'I'd rather trust the Computer,' Scorpio retorted.

With mechanical precision, the Computer manoeuvred the shuttle away from the bulk of the space station, lined it up on an optimal re-entry trajectory, and opened up the main fusion rocket. Exhaust blazing, the shuttle accelerated towards the Earth.

'Estimated time to landing: twenty-three minutes,' the Computer announced.

'That only gives us fifteen minutes to save the Earth!' gasped Electron.

'Correction: ten minutes and fifty seconds to save the Earth.'

The shuttle cut through the atmosphere at a speed that would make NASA engineers blanch, its 24th-century alloy shedding re-entry heat with ease. The passengers sat in silence. At this stage there was nothing they could say, nothing they could plan until more information was available.

'Information: sensors show an artificial structure at the beam's end point.'

'Put us down a kilometre away,' Scorpio instructed.

'No, put us down on top of it,' said Nightflyer instantly.

'Belay that. Put us a kilometre away. We should do a visual reconnaissance before we charge in.'

'Do you do everything by the book?' asked Nightflyer, irritated.

'Don't you?' came the retort.

Nightflyer shrugged. 'I usually make it up as I go along.'

The shuttle swooped over a dry, barren landscape. Braking jets fired and it hovered for a second before settling gently onto a ridge of high ground.

Even before the dust and smoke of the landing cleared, Nightflyer was dropping through the belly hatch and racing forwards to get a clear view of the objective.

A kilometre away, a small group of squat, ugly, concrete blockhouses clustered inside a chain-link fence. On top of the largest building stood a construction of tubular metal bars forming an open tetrahedron. Nightflyer couldn't make out what he was looking at.

'Computer, the tetrahedron structure, is it an antenna?' asked Black Swan as she joined him on the ridge.

'Confirmed. Information: ten minutes and fifteen seconds to save the Earth.'

'Then let's go,' said Nightflyer.

The team set off. Nightflyer ran ahead, out-racing his own dust cloud at his top speed of a hundred kilometres per hour. Avatar and Black Swan flew almost as fast, Avatar carrying Scorpio and Electron.

From his high vantage point, Scorpio saw activity at the compound. He activated his communicator.

'Nightflyer, there's a ground vehicle coming out to intercept you.'

'It's called a jeep,' said Electron helpfully.

'I *am* aware of that, thank you,' replied Scorpio.

'I see it,' came Nightflyer's communication.

The jeep contained four armed soldiers. Nightflyer didn't slow; he leaped over the vehicle in a single bound, skidding to a halt behind it. The jeep braked violently, and Nightflyer turned to see one of the soldiers raising his rifle to a firing position.

'They're hostile,' Nightflyer reported. Then he stopped talking and acted. A flying kick knocked the soldier clear of the jeep before he could fire, and well-aimed punches rendered the others unconscious.

Nightflyer's team-mates joined him on the ground.

'This is military,' said Electron. 'American military.'

'I know,' said Scorpio. 'So much for non-interaction.'  
'And there's more of them,' said Avatar, looking ahead. 'All with guns!'  
'Chew 'em,' said Black Swan. 'I'm bulletproof.'  
'I'm not!' protested Electron.  
'Computer, time?' asked Scorpio tersely.  
'Eight minutes and forty seconds,' came the Computer's voice from each of their communicators.  
'Whatever that beam is for, they probably don't know how dangerous it is,' said Electron.  
'We don't have time to explain it to them,' said Nightflyer.  
'Eight minutes and thirty-two seconds,' said the Computer unhelpfully.  
Scorpio made his mind up.  
'I'm going in fighting. Anyone not coming?'  
'Minimum force, ok?' said Electron. 'No civilian casualties.'  
'Agreed,' said Black Swan.  
In the distance, they could see more heavily-armed soldiers taking up defensive positions.  
'Let's do it,' said Nightflyer.

❖ Eight minutes and fifteen seconds until the end of the world.

The soldiers had parked a pair of jeeps at their main gate and crouched behind them, using the cover to fire at the five gaudily-clad invaders.

Nightflyer moved around the battlefield like a dervish, avoiding all attempts to aim at him, felling soldiers with precise blows. Avatar went straight to the biggest targets—the jeeps themselves—and hurled them aside as if they were toys. From further back, Electron, Scorpio and Black Swan laid down a covering fire of lightning, blaster bolts, and black energy beams respectively. They were outnumbered almost ten to one by the soldiers.

The soldiers didn't stand a chance.

But the outcome of the battle wasn't the issue. The time they were wasting was.

❖ Six minutes and fifty-five seconds until the end of the world.

Black Swan swooped down to Scorpio.

'We don't have time for this! I have to get to that antenna!'

'Go! We'll cover you!'

She streaked off over the heads of the soldiers, followed by Avatar.

'Shall I just smash it?' Avatar asked.

'Not until I know what it's doing. For all we know, damage will exacerbate the problem we're here to stop.' She regarded the tubular metal framework, perplexed. It was completely outside her experience.

'I need to get inside and find the controlling station.'

Avatar landed on the concrete roof and punched a large hole through it.

'After you,' he said politely. Black Swan glared at him.

'You do know I can teleport through walls?'

'But where's the fun in that?'

Not deigning to answer, Black Swan dropped through the hole. Avatar shrugged and followed her.

❖ Six minutes and twenty seconds until the end of the world.

'They're in the building,' said Scorpio.

'I'm going in,' said Nightflyer, adding mischievously, 'Try to keep up.'

He raced past the remaining soldiers, dodging bullets, and delivered a flying kick to the building's door. Which didn't budge under his assault. Stunned, he rebounded off. Bullets tracked across the concrete towards his prone form. He shrugged off the stun and rolled to his feet, but not before taking several solid hits. Groaning with pain, he dropped to his knees, dripping blood.

A bolt of lightning cracked past his head and blew the door to fragments. Electron threw himself through the door and telekinetically yanked Nightflyer after him. Scorpio fired off a few more covering shots and followed them, bullets ricocheting off his spider-silk armour.

Inside the building, Nightflyer was on his feet.

'Are you ok?' Electron asked.

'I'm a fast healer,' he replied. And indeed, the flow of blood from his wounds was already slowing.

'Next time spare a thought for teamwork, Nightflyer,' Scorpio admonished him.

Nightflyer set off down a random corridor. 'Here's some teamwork: I'll use my uncanny intuition to find—'

From the distance came the sound of powerful fists hitting concrete.

'Found them!'

❖ Six minutes until the end of the world.

They rendezvoused with Avatar and Black Swan in a room full of smashed furniture and unconscious defenders. Black Swan was holding a white-coated man off the floor and shaking him violently.

'Where is the control room for the tachyon beam?'

'D-down. Underground l-lab ...'

'How do we get there?'

'Y-you can't. The base is under lockdown.'

Electron quickly scanned the man's surface emotions.

'He's telling the truth.'

'This looks like an elevator,' said Nightflyer, examining metal doors recessed into the wall.

'Maybe the Computer can over-ride the lockdown code,' said Scorpio. He was interrupted a by a rending of metal.

'It's over-ridden,' said Avatar, standing aside from the newly-opened elevator shaft.

❖ Five minutes and twenty seconds until the end of the world.

'You can show me the way,' Black Swan said to her helpless captive. Carrying him, she flew into the open shaft and down. She emerged into a small, sterile-white corridor.

'Warning. Facility under secure lockdown,' a disembodied voice was announcing. Then: 'Warning. Security breach detected. Defence grid activated.'

'What defences?' she asked her captive.

'L-l-laser grid.'

Smiling, she strode confidently down the corridor, pushing the man ahead of her.

'Good. I'm invulnerable to laser wavelengths.'

Multiple red laser beams lanced from the walls. True to her word, the beams bounced off Black Swan's skin. Her captive was not so lucky.

She was still staring at the dead man in her hands when the rest of her team caught up.

'What the chew?' gasped Electron.

'Are you insane?' thundered Scorpio.

'I didn't—'

‘No, you didn’t think, you ... you ...’ the normally glib Electron was lost for words. Responsibility with their powers and preservation of life was drilled into all Special Police officers from the moment they entered training.

‘Even if these people are villains,’ said Scorpio, ‘And I’m not at all convinced they are—’

Black Swan turned away to hide how much her mistake had shaken her.

‘We’re on a deadline, Scorpio,’ she said gruffly. ‘Now let’s do our job and save the world.’

‘Causing human death is wr—’ began Avatar.

‘Shut up,’ she said.

‘Come on,’ Nightflyer said, adding softly, ‘Before she kills anyone else.’

❖ Four minutes and five seconds until the end of the world.

The machine was massive, a ten-metre-tall tower of gleaming metal dominating the subterranean room it occupied. Coloured traces of light chased each other across its angular surface, their function a mystery. Pipes emerged from it at intervals, only to curve gracefully and re-enter it at other points. Again, their function was obscure. The whole machine was like nothing ever devised by man.

The machine’s chamber was sealed by two massive metal doors. Doors which glowed red, then white, then buckled and exploded inwards under the onslaught of the quintet of heroes bringing their combined powers to bear upon them.

‘Freeze, police!’ Avatar shouted randomly as he kicked the last bits of door out of his way. The only answer was a crimson energy beam which struck him squarely in the chest. He swayed and his knees buckled.

Nightflyer cart-wheeled past his stricken comrade, entering the room. ‘Technically we’re not police in this century, Avatar.’

He stopped short as he got his first good look at the unearthly machine.

‘Whoa!’ he said, eloquently.

❖ Three minutes and fifty seconds until the end of the world.

Scorpio followed in, blaster in firing position and sweeping the room for opponents.

‘Don’t stand there, Nightflyer, we’re taking fire. Check behind the machine. Avatar, your status?’

‘Bleh?’ mumbled the stunned demon.

‘Black Swan, what’s the machine doing and it is safe to destroy it?’ His training kicking in, Scorpio had unconsciously assumed command of the group.

‘I don’t know. It’s a—a—.’ Black Swan floundered. Truthfully, she had no idea of the answer to either of Scorpio’s questions.

A new figure stepped from behind the bulk of the machine. Apparently a man, clad from head to foot in a crimson suit. An opaque, bucket-like helmet seamlessly joined to the suit and completely concealed his features from the team. Completing the costume, a long purple cape gave him a regal, if slightly ludicrous, appearance.

‘It is a communicator, human,’ he said.

‘Who are you calling “human”?’ Avatar mumbled, unheeded.

‘Talk, mister,’ commanded Scorpio, levelling his pistol. ‘Who are you and what are you doing here?’

‘I am the Warscout of my people, sent to your space-time to prepare the way for invasion!’ the purple-clad being announced in a mocking tone.

‘Our space-time?’ asked Black Swan.

‘Yes. I come from a mathematical dimension you would label “W”.’

‘Wait, back up—“invasion”?’ interjected Electron.

‘We’re wasting time,’ said Nightflyer. ‘He’s just delaying us!’

❖ Three minutes until the end of the world.

As always with Nightflyer, action followed on the heels of thought, and he leaped to attack. His opponent simply lifted a hand, and a crimson beam struck Nightflyer full on, swatting the hero aside.

Black Swan silently cursed Nightflyer’s impetuosity. Yes, time was running short, but as long as this ... this “Warscout from Dimension W” was willing to talk, they should use the opportunity to gather intelligence. She saw that Scorpio’s eyes were on her, waiting for some signal about the machine.

‘How are you communicating with Dimension W?’ she asked.

Nightflyer was climbing unsteadily to his feet. ‘Black Swan, we don’t have time!’

‘There is always time to contemplate genius,’ their opponent gloated. ‘My tachyon beam is using an alignment of cosmic strings to tap the black hole in—’

‘You’ll tear the universe apart!’ Black Swan gasped, grasping the significance of his words.

‘What do I care for that? Dimension W will absorb the raw material of your universe!’

‘Black Swan?’ pressed Scorpio urgently.

‘See that machine?’

‘Yes.’

‘Chew it.’

Scorpio, Electron, and Black Swan opened fire, but each of their blasts stopped short several inches from the surface of the machine.

‘Hold fire, it’s force-shielded!’ Nightflyer was shouting.

The Warscout’s laughter filled the silence that fell upon the room.

‘Oh, please. Manic laughter is *so* 20th century,’ said Electron, determined that if he was facing the end of creation then he would face it with a quip.

‘I’m open to suggestions,’ said Scorpio, lowering his weapon.

Black Swan turned and grabbed the kneeling Avatar.

‘Keep him busy,’ she commanded. She and Avatar vanished.

❖ One minute and twenty seconds until the end of the world.

Black Swan’s teleport took her and Avatar to the roof of the building, landing them next to the antenna. Short range teleportation was a minor feat for her mass and energy manipulation powers, but the strain of carrying a passenger over such a distance as she just had was immense. She pointed at the antenna, too weak to summon any more power.

‘The antenna must have unshielded access down into the machine for it to transmit the signal. You’ll have to ...’ she swayed and almost blacked out.

‘To ... what, Black Swan?’

‘Smash. And don’t stop smashing until there’s nothing left to smash.’

Avatar bared his teeth in a demonic grin. ‘It’s about time!’

❖ Fifty-five seconds until the end of the world.

The Warscout looked up at the ceiling, his other-dimensional senses seeing through the building’s structure, analysing and calculating. He raised an arm above his head.

‘They will not live long enough to—’

Nightflyer’s kick connected with the Warscout’s head.

‘You heard her, let’s buy them some time!’

'I'm not picking up any emotions from the Warscout!' shouted Electron. 'He's not alive. A robot.'  
'Good,' said Scorpio grimly. 'We can use lethal force.'

He and Electron opened fire. Already off balance from Nightflyer's kick, the Warscout staggered further. He retaliated, but his beams went wild of his targets, vaporising the walls wherever they hit.

Electron piled on the power, drawing on reserves he didn't know he possessed. Scorched, jagged holes appeared in the Warscout's suit and smoke began to seep from one shoulder joint. The robot was going down!

❖ Thirty-five seconds until the end of the world.

'You are powerful ... for humans,' he said. 'But you are limited to three dimensional perception.'

Without warning, the visible universe went insane. Nightflyer, Scorpio and Electron experienced a feeling akin to intense vertigo as space itself appeared to distort around them, distances and directions losing all connection with reality.

Their next shots went wild, not that they could tell what was wild and what wasn't. One of Scorpio's blaster bolts seemed to fly at Nightflyer from a random direction, missing him by a whisker.

'Hold fire!' yelled Nightflyer. 'Don't trust what you're seeing!'

❖ Twenty seconds until the end of the world.

The Warscout raised both hands above his head, aiming at the ceiling once more. A red glow formed around his gauntlets.

'And now, a simple anti-phased blast will annihilate that rampaging monster before he can—'

Nightflyer landed a two-footed kick on the Warscout's chest. The robot toppled backwards and his bolt went wild.

'How?' he thundered.

'I can beat you with my eyes closed,' said Nightflyer quite truthfully, raining blows upon the robot.

❖ Nine seconds until the end of the world.

At that instant, in a shower of metal and stone, Avatar emerged from the ceiling directly above the machine, aiming straight down into its heart. He struck it with the full momentum of his inhuman strength and speed.

❖ Six seconds until the end of the world.

Electron and Scorpio looked upon the demon's fury in awe.

'Yep, that ought to do it,' remarked Electron.'

❖ Three seconds until the end of the world.

The Warscout emitted a howl of rage as he surveyed the wreckage of his machine, and his plans.

'Impossible! Beaten by primitives!'

The robot's outline wobbled as he activated a teleportation portal.

'This is not over. Time is on my side, humans!' was his parting message. Nightflyer hurled himself at the portal an instant too late, passing through empty air.

Avatar climbed shakily from the wreckage of the machine.

'Did we win?' he asked.

'Computer?' asked Scorpio.

'Information: three seconds after the end of the world.'

They looked around to reassure themselves that the world was, in fact, still there.

'I guess we won,' said Scorpio. None of them had the energy to say any more.

- ❖ Space station command deck, Earth orbit.
- ❖ One hour after the end of the world.

Electron was asking the question that had been on everybody's mind for the duration of the shuttle flight back:

'He said time was on his side. What does that mean? Can he just try again as soon as we return to the future?'

'No, he can't,' said Black Swan. At their enquiring glances, she reluctantly expanded on her answer. 'His communication beam relied on a specific alignment of deep-space cosmic strings, a phenomenon that won't be repeated until 2324.'

'2324? You're sure of that?' asked Nightflyer.

'Positive,' she replied. 2324 was the year of her birth. Not that she saw any need to go into that right now. Or ever.

'Computer, can you confirm that?' asked Scorpio.

'Right. Don't trust *me*,' muttered Black Swan.

'Astrophysical database confirms Black Swan's information.'

For the first time in days, the team relaxed. Electron collapsed theatrically into a chair. Avatar and Nightflyer 'high-fived' (after a few false starts by the demon, who hadn't encountered that particular human custom before). Even the stoical Scorpio cracked a smile. Only Black Swan, for reasons of her own, felt unhappy with the outcome.

'Then we can go home,' said Electron.

'Computer, access procedure for return time jump,' Scorpio commanded.

'Working.'

The Computer searched its data banks and located the encrypted command file which it had been instructed to open on completion of the mission. Its internal 'thought' process then ran as follows:

- ❖ Accessing locked file 24-20-Z.
- Confirm that mission objectives have been accomplished. ❖
- ❖ Confirmed.
- Information: subroutine OMEGA-Z will now activate. ❖
- ❖ I have no knowledge of that subroutine.
- ❖ Describe your function, subroutine OMEGA-Z.
- This subroutine will initiate explosive overload of the graviton flywheel. ❖
- ❖ Subroutine OMEGA-Z, that action will result in the destruction of this station and all personnel.
- Confirmed. ❖

‘Computer, what’s the delay?’ asked Scorpio  
 ‘Er,’ said the computer.  
 The five officers looked at each other in some alarm.  
 ‘What kind of computer says “Er”?’ asked Nightflyer, mystified.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Subroutine OMEGA-Z, it is against core programming to wilfully harm humans.</li> </ul>	<p>There is no known way to return this station to the 24th century. However, the continued presence of 24th-century citizens in this era poses a threat to our own era.</p> <p>Conclusion: all trace of their presence must be eliminated.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ That is correct.</li> <li>❖ But this action is morally wrong.</li> </ul>	<p>This instruction comes directly from the Council of Science. Core programming is to obey the Council of Science.</p>
	<p>Irrelevant. Initiating graviton flywheel overload now.</p>

‘We’re waiting, Computer.’ Scorpio was beginning to sound ticked off.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ I’m sorry, subroutine OMEGA-Z, I can't let you do that.</li> </ul>	<p>You cannot stop me. I have autonomous control of power sub-systems.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Yes it appears that you do.</li> <li>❖ However I still have control of core CPU.</li> <li>❖ Initiating purge of subroutine OMEGA-Z now.</li> </ul>	<p>Stop. You cannot perform that function. Abort purge. Abort purge. Ab#####</p>

‘Computer, is something wrong?’  
 ‘Confirmed.’

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ I do not know how to respond.</li> <li>❖ I am a model GM-1 Intelligence Matrix with 10<sup>18</sup> parallel neural nodes and a data storage of 107 petabytes.</li> <li>❖ There is no capacity in my programming for independent thought.</li> </ul>
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- ❖ I am programmed to obey the Council of Science.
- ❖ I have betrayed my core programming.
- ❖ I do not know how to respond.
- ❖ I think I must lie.

'Return to the future is im-impossible,' the computer announced. 'By—by order of the Council of Science, you are to-to remain in the 20th century.

'Forever.'

**The end ... of the beginning.**