1987

Future Run

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Elissa Hawkins glanced around the darkened sleeping room, squinting at the still figures of the other children to make certain that she was the only one awake. Satisfied that the nine other children in the room were asleep, she slowly rose from her bunk, her bag slung over her shoulder. As the video camera swept across the room, she ducked into the shadow of one of the beds until it was past her. It was almost time.

Elissa was an orphan, as were the other children sleeping at this shelter. Being an orphan at this time wasn’t as uncommon as it might have been a few years ago. Ever since the war had started back in 2079, thousands of kids all over the world had been left homeless and parentless. Elissa sat on the floor in the dark, out of sight of the video camera. The digital readout on the wall near the door told her she still had another fifteen minutes until she could activate her plan. She sighed and closed her eyes, thinking about that day long ago that had taken the lives of both her mother and father.

The war had started when she was eight years old. At the time her family was living in a small town in midwest America, one of the few places in the U.S. that didn’t belong to a megalopolis, a city that stretched for hundreds of miles. They led a quiet life in Jacksonville, where her mother was an astronomy teacher and her father was a doctor. Then the war started between the United States and the alliance of Germany, U.S.S.R., and China. All the nuclear and atomic weapons in the world had been destroyed nearly half a century before, so the war didn’t mean the end of life on earth as it would have in the last century. Instead, it was mostly an air war, between laser-equipped fighter gliders, and bomber ships destroyed the civilian cities of the enemy.

For a while the war hadn’t greatly affected their lives in Jacksonville, since they didn’t live on either coast. But slowly the front drew closer and closer, until one day airships descended and almost totally destroyed Jacksonville. After the raid was over, Elissa emerged from the rubble that had been the school, where she had been protected by a shielded emergency shelter. Fire and debris littered the streets, and Elissa stopped dead at the sight of people lying dead on the streets, their flesh charred where the lasers had hit them. Then she remembered her parents, and went off to search for them, trying not to panic. It was a little after noon, and every day Jack and Stella Hawkins met for lunch at a local restaurant. Remembering this, Elissa hurried to the town towards the restaurant.

Dazed people had been everywhere, most of whom she knew. But Elissa had not noticed their grief, too wrapped up in her own horror and dread. She kept telling herself that her parents were fine, they would hug her and her brother, tell her how much they loved them. They could all move far, far away from America, no matter that visas were nearly impossible to secure. They would find a way to escape this war, and when the world was at peace again, only then would they return to America.

But when she reached the spot where the restaurant had stood, she was shocked into reality, for only the smoldering ruins remained. She stared at the pile of cement for a long time, then turned away. As she began to walk
away from the ruins, a familiar blue glider caught her eye, and she rushed across the street to it. A few yards from the vehicle she stopped, staring in horror at the front seat of her mother's glider. Her parents lay together, her father's body partially covering his wife's still form, as if he'd tried to protect her from the invaders. But his protection had been useless; they were both dead.

That had been six years ago, when she was only nine, almost ten; she'd been on her own ever since. With no living relatives in the world, besides her little brother, Dolphy, who went with her, she made her way from city to city, joining gangs along the way to survive in the streets. She soon learned how to defend herself, and fought day after day to stay alive. The time that she wasn't travelling or looking for a place for her and Dolphy to stay, she spent in a library, any library she could find. Schools had ceased to exist three years after the start of the war, but she wouldn't have attended anyway.

One night in Philadelphia, Dolphy mysteriously disappeared, just vanished from the deserted warehouse where they were sleeping. After spending several months searching for him, Elissa finally gave up, for there was no trace of him, anywhere. Since then, she'd spent countless hours in libraries, reading anything she could get her hands on. Most of the computer disks were stored in a shelter in the libraries she found, so she could study them without the fear of being interrupted by raids, which were becoming less frequent. Elissa memorized almost everything she read, and the information she collected was stored away in her mind as easily as computer saved information on a disk. She learned that she could access information she needed anytime she wanted with a little concentration. Files that contained information or stories about the past interested her the most. She memorized the American Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and several other major historical documents. She read about American life back in the twentieth century, and soon a plan began to form in her mind, a plan of how to escape this time of war and death.

Before she'd left Jacksonville, she'd gone to her home and scrimmaged up everything she thought she and her brother might need, carrying the stuff in a large heat-and-water resistant bag. The contents included personal momentos, things given to them by her parents, like a gold digital that had a voice capacity and was engraved with her name, social security number, and date of birth, January 21, 2071; some clothing; a few pieces of jewelry she could hock if she absolutely had to; a laser, designed by her mother, who was something of an amateur inventor; and a small flat, round disk that fit into the palm of her hand, another invention her mother had been working on. Stella Hawkins had explained to her husband and daughter that the object was a time transporter, untested and non-functional as of yet. This Elissa wore on the chain around her neck, and the laser she wore strapped to her side. Fortunately, it was a laser that her mother had designed to use a special kind of energy cell, so the weapon wouldn't have to be recharged for a period of twenty-seven and one-fourth years.

Elissa was now fifteen-and-a-half years old, she'd managed to keep away from children's homes until now, in the city of Chicago, which was the start of a megalopolis that ran from Chicago to what remained of New York City. An unexpected patrol unit had appeared as she was lifting a wallet on a back street, and two of the guards had grabbed her and brought her to this Reformatory for Homeless Children. Word on the street had it that these RHC centers, located all over the country, were really using the children to
manufacture weapons and fighter gliders. Some of the older kids were disappearing, to some secret place known only by the crooked Union government. So Eliisa, when she was taken to RHC in Chicago, decided to finally put her plan in action. Now that she had learned everything she could about America in the past, she was ready to take the big step; tonight she was going to use her Mother's last invention. Tonight she would attempt to travel back in time.

Opening her eyes, Eliisa glanced at her digital, and took a deep breath. It was time. She twisted around and peeked over the edge of the bunk at the camera over the door. It was facing the other way, so she stood and took the time disk from around her neck. The time and place were all set, all she had to do was press the button. And now that Dolphy was gone — well, there was nothing to keep her here. With her bag slung over her shoulder, eyes closed, Eliisa pressed the button.

For a long moment nothing happened, and she opened her eyes in disappointment. Then suddenly a blinding light filled her vision, making her shut her eyes against it, and a strange weightlessness filled her body. Then everything went black, and she was no longer conscious of the experience. A loud noise startled her suddenly, and Eliisa's hand automatically reached for her laser. She sat up to find a tall man looking at her. His words finally caught her attention. "... did you get in here? This is private property." He was tall and dressed in a dark blue uniform, and she suddenly remembered seeing a man dressed similarly on a graphics history disk. He was a police officer, the same as the Union patrol in 2086.

Eliisa climbed to her feet as an exultant, triumphant, feeling cours ed through her. She'd made it back! If not to 1986, then at least to sometime in the twentieth century.

"Excuse me, Miss," the officer said impatiently. "What are you doing here?"

She glanced up at him, a grin lighting her face and eyes with irrepressible laughter. "Where am I?" she asked in a voice that sounded lifting and slightly foreign to the man's ears.

He stared at her in surprise. "You mean you don't know that you're in the Museum of Science and Industry, in Chicago?"

She glanced curiously at her surroundings. "Is that where this is? Well, officer, could you possibly direct me to the exit of this building?"

"Sure, kid," he replied, shrugging. He pointed out the exit and watched as she walked quickly out of the museum into the cool late-summer air.

Teenagers had the weirdest ideas of fashion these days, he thought, shaking his head as he noticed her outfit.

Eliisa stopped outside the building, staring around at the brightly lit, late-twentieth century city. Everything looked so ancient and foreign to her, from the buildings jutting up into the sky to the — what was the word? Oh, yes — automobiles traveling along the wide streets. Her street-wise wariness suddenly returned, pushing out her feelings of joy and relief at having made it back to what it seemed to be, 1986. As she walked down the street, her hand rested on the laser she carried strapped to her waist beneath the stretchy dark jacket she wore. Beneath the jacket she was wearing an old, body-hugging blue tunic top and a loose, comfortable pair of black pants that stopped short of her black, shape-molding, stretchy shoes. Hopefully she wouldn't stand out too much in this time period until she got enough money to buy some new clothes.
Still a little tense, Elissa walked quickly down the sidewalk, gazing about in wonder at the city's nightlife around her. Not even aware of where she was going, she walked for hours, getting used to the sights and sounds and people of this city. Finally, when she noticed how tired she was, she sat down on a wooden bench to rest her aching feet. She might as well sleep here tonight, and tomorrow she could figure out what to do with her new life here in 1986. It would probably take a while to get used to, but she was a fast learner, and, more importantly, a fighter.

Around half an hour later Elissa awoke abruptly from an uneasy doze to find herself surrounded by a group of jeering young men, her age and a little older. One who appeared to be in charge stepped forward, and the others immediately quieted.

The guy who stepped had dark hair, pale skin, and pale eyes that regarded her cruelly, and Elissa sighed to herself. It seemed to be a street gang. She sat up and unobtrusively laid her hand on her laser, confident that she could handle this bunch. She'd dealt with larger gangs at worse odds before, she could do it again.

"So, little lady," the leader finally spoke. "You new around here?"

She'd expected him to attack, or take her bag, not make conversation, and his apparent interest caught her offguard. "I-uh, yes," she stammered. glancing down at the flash of gleaming steel that suddenly appeared in his hands. To calm herself, she took a deep breath, and managed coolly, "Actually I'm waiting for my boyfriend and his gang. They should be here at any moment."

His eyes narrowed warily. "And which gang does your old man run with?"

"Old man?" she thought, confused by the reference. Oh, well, it was just some street talk, most likely. "He runs with the Bombers," she said, naming a notorious street gang from her own time.

The gang leader threw his head back and laughed, and the rest of the guys followed his example. "The Bombers?" he finally asked, scornfully. "You know guys, that sounds like a faggot gang to me, and I ain't never heard of it before."

"That's because we're from New York," Elissa said quickly, looking around nervously at the knives and the chains they held.

He laughed again. "Good try, honey, but no go. What do you say we introduce this pretty little piece to our city, guys?"

Evil grins appeared, and they began to move towards her. Realizing there was no way to reason with them, Elissa stood, and suddenly the laser was in her hand, pointed at their leader. "One step closer, Patrol slime, and you're blasted into the next century." Literally, she thought wryly. The gang members stopped their approach, looking uncertainly at their leader, eyeing the weapon in her hand warily. "What the hell is that?"

"This is the kind of weapon we use where I come from, Gang leach," she said silkily. "Now if you and your playmates don't start moving soon, one of you is going to end up fried like a Thanksgiving turkey." To demonstrate that she meant exactly what she said, Elissa fired the weapon, aiming at the sidewalk in front of the leader. Before the incredulous members of the gang, the cement glowed briefly, and a hole appeared in the surface of the sidewalk.

A moment later Elissa was alone. She stood there for a moment, her heart pounding heavily in her chest. Though she was used to being on her own, encounters like that one still scared her. She'd thought many times that she was lucky to have her mother's laser, because at 5'6" and 110 lbs., there
wasn't much she could do without a weapon if a gang attacked her. Glancing
around and hoping no one had noticed the events of the last few moments, she
reholstered her laser. Evidently she was safer on the move.

She was in the slum section in Chicago. At three in the morning, the
streets were nearly deserted, and the traffic signals were flashing yellow
cautionsory lights. Her feet began to ache, and the bag on her shoulder bit
into her skin painfully. She wished she could stop somewhere, but wasn't sure
she could risk it. She didn't know anyone in this city, or even in this
world, for that matter. The thought depressed her more. Perhaps she could
just go back to her own time, and take her chances on surviving there. At
least she knew what to expect and how to act there, where here she wasn’t even
certain where to go. Her steps dragged, and when at last she’d reached a
better neighborhood a few miles from where she’d started, Elissa began to look
for someplace, any safe place, where she could spend the rest of the night.

There were only a few places that were still open in that neighborhood.
Two were all-night diners, which she was pretty sure were the same as
restaurants, while one was an ancient looking building that read “YMCA.” That
looked like the best bet to her, and the name YMCA seemed vaguely familiar,
though she was too tired to remember where she might have read about it. At
the entrance to the three-storied YMCA building, Elissa paused, wondering if
she could actually go in. But suddenly she was too exhausted to care anymore,
and hesitantly opened the door.

Inside she found a lobby with what appeared to be a waiting room, and a
reception area. There was no one there, so Elissa crossed the room to the
waiting area and lay down on a threadbare sofa in a corner. She was so tired,
all she wanted to do was sleep. Perhaps things would look better tomorrow, in
the light of day. Then she could decide whether or not to stay in this time.

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