

The Twenty Minute War

by Jann Burner

Jannsun Rader had started work for *Matrix* right after he tired of trying to write the great American Novel, which was about five years ago, right after the war. He was old for a Web Zone designer but who knew? Who cared? His work was all done via satellite and as long as his work was good, his online brokerage account kept growing and growing.

He grabbed his sat phone, his digital companion, and headed topside. The wind had settled down and he was making 5.5 knots over the surface of the water according to the GPS. He gained some sort of comfort in thinking of the cloud of satellites overhead keeping track of his exact location anywhere upon the surface of the globe. Single handed sailing was surely not what it used to be. Now the isolation was more illusion than reality. If he should encounter serious trouble, his position would be marked from satellites and a hover craft would be onsite within two hours. Hell, they probably would even have a photograph of his terror stricken face. Of course the insurance bill would be hefty, but it was the law. The illusion was fine though, he could really feel himself to be the last (or the first) man on earth. From horizon to horizon for days on end, not one sign of human habitation.

He walked to the rear of the cockpit and sat behind the wheel as the auto pilot silently turned it ever so slightly in accordance with the next way-point previously set into the Global Positioning System software. Through the fog, he could see the *Golden Gate Bridge* in the distance, or what was left of it, since the earth changes had started. It would be good to get back to San Francisco or San Frantasia as it was now called since it had been pretty well destroyed by the Richter 8.9 quake the previous year.

On his radar, Jannsun could see the blip of a large freighter coming over the horizon. These cargo carriers were absolutely huge. As he got closer he could see the helicopter lift off and turn back

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toward land. That would be carrying the crew. These new ships were totally robotic once they reached the twenty five mile limit. Then the crew was choppered off and the ship sailed on controlled by the auto pilot and the overhead satellite array. Since they were so large they could not turn to avoid a small craft such as Jannsun's, so their defense was an ungodly loud alarm horn which woke Jannsun up on more than one occasion. The klaxon would be triggered at five miles separation if the ship's radar suspected a possible collision. Once the horn was sounded it was the smaller craft's job to move out of the path of the floating city of steel. Still there was no guarantee. Many a large cargo ship had entered port with the debris of smaller vessels caught in the anchor chain and smeared across the steel bow.

As Jannsun watched the sails pull his boat along over the small waves he had to laugh when he thought of the recent *War* and the rumors about the war. He had been between the Marshall Islands and Hawaii when it happened. It was supposed to be a secret but it seemed the older he became and the more connected he became, the more secrets he was becoming privy to.

He heard it from a guy, who heard it from a guy, who knew a guy, who was actually involved. According to this guy, *The War* lasted twenty minutes, give or take a few seconds. The computers told each side who would win, by how much and the outside limits of the overall devastation. But the losing side was new to computer war and insisted on firing a real nuclear salvo. That mistake would not be made again.

Jannsun had been aware of the holo-projection of soldiers and implements of destruction on and over battlefields and street corners but he hadn't been aware of the *Time Benders*, the Mach 50 anti-gravity machines. Machines that were so fast they could actually intercept an enemy missile before it's physical body could completely lift off its launching pad. Machines so fast it was said they literally--bent time. These *Time Benders* were said to be able to move from a base in the states to a foreign battle field before a hostile combatant's hand could cycle a round into the firing chamber

of his rifle. So fast, they could be there before an enemy tech's fingers hovering over a computer keyboard somewhere in a subterranean bunker could even reach the "*Enter*" key. Two seconds, maybe less. Some even went so far as to say that the newest stealth, skunk works stuff was so fast it could actually bend time and travel slightly backward so as to be there looking over the enemy's shoulder as the hostile idea first seemed to occur in his mind. *Time Benders*. San Frantasia to New York in two seconds, maybe four. The time delay was to give the controller on the ground a chance to gather his thoughts. No passengers allowed.

These craft were not piloted by human beings. It was found way back in the nineties that human pilots could not take anything above 12 "G's" before slipping out of their bodies. This was called "*G-lock*" and it spelled the end for super high performance manned fighter planes. These robo-drone super planes were now all flown remotely by teenagers from underground bunkers. It was the ultimate synchronicity that children (future warriors) had been training for years on very sophisticated and ever evolving 3-d video games. The athletic pilot/engineer of the 20th Century was a thing of the past, just another artifact. Technology was on the verge of time travel, and American teenagers would be the ones with their grimy little fingers on the buttons.

In the case of the *Twenty Minute War*, five enemy nucs blew about ten feet off their own launching pads. "*No Nucs Today*", was the glad news on *CNN* that evening. At least not on American soil. The media, fed by the government machine, made it appear the enemy was so incompetent that all their missiles misfired and exploded in their silos but both sides knew the truth. Jannsun knew the truth, or as much of it as his personal data net was aware of. Who really knew anything for sure anymore? It looked like the technology of perception had finally outrun the technology of verification.

Maybe there was no truth. Things had become so strange that sometimes Jannsun suspected that *everything* had already happened and we were just toying with selective memory.

