

The Future Archaeologists

A Short-ish Short by HORansome

In a bend of reality just five seconds away from now there exists a hole in time that stretches five thousand years into the future. You can see it if you really try; a small glimmer, a miasma that makes the world look unexpected and pure. If you can catch a glance of it you might very well see someone looking back at you. If you do, then you have seen one of them.

A future archaeologist.

Epistemologically speaking, archaeology is a dead science. With little to work with the anthropologist of material culture must construe and reconstruct. With a fragment of bone, a piece of cloth and a cudgel whole histories are inarticulately woven.

False histories.

Well, histories that might not be true.

The future archaeologist, emboldened with technologies such as the temporal weave and neurolinguistic-aided nanite analysis need not risk conjecture and rely on inference. She knows the past.

They know our now.

The Twentieth Century is a favourite of the future archaeologist. A lot was written and a lot was recorded but very little of it was accurate or truthful. War reports, propaganda analyses, newspaper editorials. By the first third of the twenty-first century none of these things could escape the machinations of artificial intelligences scouring human flesh-thoughts or the work of the North American Hiveminds. Truth was endemic because falsehoods were a cancer technology had cured. The Twentieth Century, with its fallibility and its growing abuse of human-to-human interaction was a deep and dark moment of human history.

The future archaeologists came in droves. They erected advertising campaigns to find out what 32% of American housewives really thought about creole cooking. They informed on their neighbours in Russia to see just how effective the Secretariat was in dealing with dissidents. Some of them even removed weapons of mass destruction from secular states to see how religious fundamentalists would cope with having to backtrack on their infallible statements.

The process of excavation changes the nature of the thing you are looking at. Old archaeology was quantum; future archaeology was the grand unifying theory. Everything tested was already known; its limits reinforced the need to explore, ascertain and test again. No answer felt complete; every successful statistical measure just threw up more and more questions. Why 32%? Why Southern Baptist? Why this particular shade of purple and that kind of reptile?

Soon years had to be run in tandem. 1992 with Belgians. 1992 without. A decade where Thatcher was a man. Two decades where there was no world war. India with an Empire. Tongan as a robotic super-island. None of the data was pure yet reports had to be written, histories tested, until..

Until the Twentieth Century looked nothing like the history books, the newspaper reports and the propaganda. Until the twentieth century was not. Whole populations had to be exterminated. Large tracts of land sunk into the sea.

An entirely new century.

And a new archaeology, from the next future, decided to come back and see how it had all worked.

The End