

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation

A Pre-Apocalyptic Time-Travel Campaign

By Moe Lane

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- <http://www.moelane.com>
- <https://www.patreon.com/MoeLane?ty=h>

Part 1: Introduction

It turns out that time travel is possible, but you cannot change history. Well, sort of: you *can* go back into the past to make changes, but that merely creates a new timeline, leaving yours untouched. Time travel is, unfortunately, also both publicly known, and common/cheap enough to allow non-governmental and non-military use.

There are four things in particular to remember about this campaign setting:

- The nature of time travel is such that failure in the past is reversible. If the team doesn't succeed the first time, going back Uptime resets the Downtime situation. The only limiting factor is the expense of time travel itself, and time travel is quite cheap in this setting.
- The TSO enforces a rule: no jumps of less than a hundred years Downtime. If it didn't, the TSO would get hammered by every Uptime government in the world. So, no exceptions there.
- Sometimes two or more Teams from different Uptime groups will show up in the same Downtime 'instance.' When this happens, the rule of thumb (which is apparently honored by the TSO) is that actually killing, maiming, or stranding a rival Uptimer Downtime

crosses a line. Everything else is fine, including acts against Downtimers.

- Finally, it should be fairly obvious that individuals can get away with a certain amount of sociopathy, just as long as they restrict themselves to Downtimers. Not every Uptimer indulges, of course. Perhaps not even most. But there aren't very many internal checks in place to prevent particular kinds of abuses.

At first, it was assumed that any unfortunate events in the past would *stay* in the past; but after one too many disputes that started Downtime got brought forward Uptime, the UN Security Council formed the Time Security Organization (TSO), over the vehement objections of everybody else. The TSO is often severely limited in what it can do Uptime, but has almost no restrictions over what it can do Downtime. As long as what happens Downtime stays Downtime, of course.

So, why do people go back in time? The usual reasons: research, entertainment, extended roleplay, indulgence, decadence, loot, and various forms of tourism. The TSO doesn't permit Uptimers to permanently maim, kill, or strand other *Uptimers* in Downtime; it also doesn't let Downtimers be brought Uptime without permission (and, more importantly, a nice fee to the TSO). Aside from that, anything goes. The possible long-term psychological,

ethical, and moral consequences that this could have on Uptime society are only now beginning to be realized, and many people have a vested interest in downplaying any dangers. Or in taking advantage of them, of course; societal unrest allows many great schemes to unfold unhindered.

But all of that is in the background. In the *foreground* is the work of the Smythe-Worthington Foundation, a private multinational company specializing in Downtime hands-on research. Time travel is cheap enough to allow historical research field teams, but Smythe-Worthington is where people go for *correct* answers to knotty academic questions. That this is a selling point for the company is an unfortunate, but all too real (and under-appreciated) problem with the way Uptime currently does things.

Base assumptions

Time travel is possible, but you cannot change history. Alternatively, you *can* change history, but the act of doing so merely creates a new timeline and leaves yours untouched. Also, time travel is known, and common/cheap enough to allow non-governmental or non-military use.

The academic community did not react well to the discovery of practical time travel. On the one hand, people were finally and suddenly able to go Downtime and prove

or disprove various pet theories, once and for all; on the other hand, people were finally and suddenly able to go Downtime and prove or disprove various pet theories, once and for all. There were regrettable incidents. Worse, there were no effective counter-measures put in place to prevent particular regrettable incidents from occurring again and again.

To give just one example: during one six-month period no less than seven hitherto respected academic institutions were involved in nine attempts to firebomb Shakespeare's Globe Theater, three of which were successful. All of this would have been tacitly ignored by Earth's governments -- after all, the firebombing in the past wasn't directly affecting the main timeline -- but organizations and institutions were starting to attack each other Uptime as well as Downtime. At that point, the UN Security Council nations stepped in and created an international Time Security Organization. Uniquely, the TSO doesn't act to protect the timeline *or* the past; it merely acts to keep any nonsense spawned by Downtime strictly *out* of Uptime.

That explicitly includes things like violence in the halls of academia over the culpability of Richard III, after that one infamous conference where the two factions each brought their own Richard along to argue the case. It was fascinating to watch, in its way, although there was some

controversy when a third group brought in the corpses of the murdered princes in order to confront the two Richards with them. One mini-sweating sickness epidemic later, and the TSO had all that it needed to justify operating with a firm hand Uptime.

There's a legitimate need for confirming historical data, and an interest in funding that sort of thing. For example: academic institutions have fat endowments, and a hankering to get their hands on a recording of an original live performance of *Doctor Faustus*. Or perhaps their very own Christopher Marlowe, suitably dewormed and vaccinated and so forth. For *that* sort of thing, the TSO authorizes private contractors to go in, do the job, and come back. If the TSO doesn't, it'll still happen anyway, so it's better to have recognized groups on the job.

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation is one of the more prestigious groups in that regard. With offices in London, New York, Athens, Beijing, and Buenos Aires, it specializes in filling in the holes of academic theorists. Want to see what agricultural yields were like in the Incan Empire? They can get you yearly photographs on select croplands. Need evidence that the Vikings visited New England? They'll track down where the longboats beached themselves. Trying to prove linguistic shifts in Cantonese? They'll bring back all the surreptitious audio coverage that

you could want. Just be prepared to pay for the information. And not ask any more questions than the ones that you've already purchased the answers for.

A Smythe-Worthington Field Team generally consists of four to six people. All Team members are expected to be in decent shape, know the local era and language well enough to at least pass as indigenous foreigners, and have some familiarity with local weapons. Past that, there's usually somebody who can play with documents, somebody who can talk to people, somebody who can break into things, and a few people who can initiate and/or prevent violence from taking place. A fairly straightforward team of player characters, in other words.

Campaign Setting

The world of the Smythe-Worthington Foundation is in the early stages of transitioning to something less pleasant. Cheap access to Downtime, coupled with the assumption that Downtime activities will have no consequences to Uptime conditions, encourages an increasing indifference to what Uptimers do to Downtimers. It is understood that Uptimers *matter* more, to the point where killing a Downtimer is socially considered at worst to be rather rude. Likewise, if a particular activity is illegal Uptime, yet legal Downtime -- well, don't do it where Uptimer society can see.

Not every Uptimer has this attitude, or at least takes it to its logical conclusions. The TSO in particular attracts officers favoring ethical treatment towards Downtimers. But the TSO also attracts officers who simply don't care, and the latter group often has the letter of the regulations on their side in disputes. Various religious groups are usually a good deal better about consistently advocating for reform, which is why they're specifically targeted by other groups, with a variety of agendas. And, naturally, individual Uptimers can always act as they please when going Downtime. That can include acting gently; and many do.

Interestingly, there is also one other group -- Downtimers brought Uptime -- who also consistently lobbies for reform. Downtimer 'immigrants' get treated as honorary Uptimers with a special, almost mystical connection to Downtime; this is mostly due to the fact that the TSO only permits historical figures to be brought Uptime, and usually famous historical figures at that. Having a William Shakespeare or Josephine Baker (there are definitely multiple copies of these people, and others, running around) in one's set is considered to be a social triumph, and while some of these immigrants are indifferent to Downtime suffering, a gratifying number of them are not. They can often do something about particularly egregious

situations. Whether or not this influence will last if the TSO ever finally approves that proposed 'agricultural guest worker' program (thus flooding Uptime with distinctly *non-celebrity* Downtimers) has yet to be determined.

All of this is background noise to the Smythe-Worthington Foundation, which acts as a refuge from some of the more disquieting aspects of time travel. Foundation field researchers go on missions that are usually morally innocuous enough; their teams either solve historical mysteries, collect data themselves, or stand around and guard somebody else doing either. There's plenty of adventure there, as sometimes it's not safe to get the data or ask too many impertinent questions.

There's also times when a Foundation team has to go in and smooth over any small cultural misunderstandings, where 'smooth over' can mean anything from 'spreading some bribe money around' to 'breaking somebody out of jail.' The Foundation prefers doing that last sort of thing themselves; letting the TSO do rescues runs too much legitimate risk of having Downtimers machine-gunned in the streets. The Foundation tends to attract staffers who have a problem with that sort of thing.

But the longer the campaign goes on, the more often *questionable* events will occur. Foundation teams will get

asked to do more uncomfortable missions, or else get called in to clean up after less ethical groups who screwed up a mission in a way that can't simply be solved by writing off that particular timeline (that usually means an Uptime hostage, and a situation too awkward to attract TSO notice). As Uptime gets worse and worse, Uptimers will start thinking of Downtime as a *refuge*. Some of these Uptimers will not be very nice.

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation maintains several Downtime locations, keeping a permanent staff in each in order to allow Uptimers to retain access to those timelines. If things go horribly enough Uptime, those locations would then make excellent refuges for the Foundation. The problem is that creating refugees is neither legal nor illegal; the TSO does not rule on the practice at all. That lack of prohibition also means a lack of *protection*, as well.

Part 3: The Time Security Organization

The Time Security Organization (TSO) considers itself the first, last, and only agency permitted to regulate travel to and from Downtime. Much of the world disagrees: but the five permanent nations on the UN Security Council endorse the TSO, and back the organization's policies. More to the point, the UNSC provides armed backup to the TSO's Downtime operations, up to and including the use of tactical nuclear weapons. With that kind of support, the rest of the world's opinions became irrelevant.

The TSO operates as a cross between a bureaucratic agency and a transnational mercenary company: the organization is divided into three ostensibly non-military departments, but all TSO operatives hold military rank and have been given at least basic military training. Many TSO bureaucrats are former military from UNSC nations who retired on disability. Many other TSO bureaucrats are former military who were quietly transferred to the new organization in order to get them out of the spotlight. Pseudonyms are not unknown, and generally not remarked upon.

Locations

The Nexus TSO facility is located in Queens, NYC. This complex coordinates the various Alpha facilities (each found in the capital cities of the permanent members of the UNSC). South America's Beta (national) and Gamma (local) TSO facilities are administered by Alpha Washington, Australia's by Alpha London, Africa by Alpha Paris, the Middle East by Alpha Moscow, and the rest of Asia by Alpha Beijing. Brazil and India have both requested that full Alpha facilities be built in their regions, but the UNSC has so far declined.

Staff in the Nexus and Alpha facilities are almost exclusively from the permanent UNSC member nations. Leadership in the Beta facilities is likewise drawn mostly from the permanent member nations. Gamma facilities may or may not have a local commander.

Departments of the TSO

Operations

The Operations Department handles the mechanical aspects of time travel, maintenance of temporal tracking devices, keeping the lights on and everybody paid, and most other infrastructure. Most spies for the UNSC nations end up here, by more or less mutual consent. Operations is where the smugglers, procurers, forgers, and thieves

congregate, because it is difficult to tell them apart from the transit facilitators, entertainment directors, item replicators, and acquisition specialists who all do the same things, only legally.

Research

The Research Department is in charge of providing instruction in local languages, cultures, customs, and history for TSO operations. It strives to be as efficient as possible in that task. While it is *currently* fairly sedate the methods that Research used in the past to acquire information were highly unnerving. Many of those initial researchers are still with the department; in fact, the worst offenders now *run* the department. The more ethical members of the TSO prefer to use outside contractors for their research needs for this very reason.

Intervention

Officially, the Intervention Department acts as a sort of temporal Coast Guard. Unofficially, it is long on firepower and short on deescalation; not all Intervention missions are atrocities, but even its most honorable commanders are unconcerned with 'fair fights.' The Intervention Department also has the highest percentage of non-UNSC members in its ranks.

Remit of the TSO

The TSO exists for one reason: to keep things Downtime from affecting Uptime. Uptimers can fold, spindle, and mutilate Downtime all they like, as long as it doesn't kill or permanently harm another Uptimer. To that end, the organization keeps an obsessive watch over anything coming from the past, while visibly maintaining an almost criminally indifferent attitude to the antics of Uptimers while they are Downtime.

While the TSO originally was set up to accommodate solely the permanent members of the UNSC, enough nations maintain an ad-hoc alliance of convenience to give the TSO a certain amount of independence. The rule of thumb is that none of the permanent members ask for too much, and that the TSO makes sure that the permanent members only rarely have to ask for anything. This arrangement is not even remotely stable, but no problem has come up yet that could seriously threaten it.

One place where the TSO does operate with a heavy hand Uptime is in public health. The TSO mandates that certain areas be used for traveling Downtime and back, and it monitors the disease environment around them all. The permanent members of the UNSC are all in agreement that too casual an attitude about Downtime

contagious diseases is a hostile act; the TSO can and does get authorization to threaten to 'sterilize' particularly annoying temporal operations with tactical nukes Downtime. It's actually happened three times.

Mindset of the TSO

It would be a mistake to think that the TSO is an inherently evil organization. Many of its personnel are legitimately morally upright individuals, and TSO Downtime operations are run according to Uptime's standards of ethics and morality. Western ones, specifically; the Temporal Security Agency has a strong European-American bias. The PRC and Russian members even tend to reinforce this bias, as both countries tend to assign their reform-minded troublemakers to the TSO.

In a world where sociopathy is easier to express in public, the TSO does not in fact *reward* sociopaths. But it does not particularly *penalize* them, either. The TSO expects its members to ignore each others' private activities, as long as those activities don't actually slop onto the TSO. They certainly all expect that awkwardnesses do not make it into the press because somebody leaked what they shouldn't have.

All in all, the TSO is not particularly self-reflective. It has members who are good, members who are evil, and members who simply don't care one way or another. Ironically, this makes it a point of stability in the world; if the TSO ever did start taking a principled (this includes *evil* principles) stand on things, the global situation might rapidly destabilize. Too many groups and nations out there are too dependent on the TSO's essential disinterest.

Part 4: The Smythe-Worthington Foundation

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation is the brainchild of Reginald Smythe-Worthington, who can best be described as 'Bruce Wayne, only his parents are still alive.' In other words, he's rich, handsome, extremely smart, has a talent for investigative work and gadgetry, still athletic well into his middle age -- and originally unwilling to apply himself. As a child and young adult Reginald was affable, amiable, and aimless; and if time travel had never been invented, he probably would have stayed that way to this day.

However, somebody *did* invent time travel, and the initial societal reaction to it horrified Reginald. So did the more informed societal reactions, and so did the hardening consensus in Uptime over the proper role and use of Downtime, and so forth. It became clear to him that Uptimers were at best drifting towards a truly unfortunate callousness, and at worst headed straight for outright, society-destroying wickedness (Reginald was himself personally shocked to discover that he apparently could use that word unironically). So he created the Foundation five years after the invention of time travel, in the hopes that having a privately controlled, ethical organization on the scene would help mitigate the growing problem.

It seems to have succeeded in its mitigation efforts; whether it's succeeded *enough* is an unanswered question. The Foundation is successful, and even dominant in its part of the time travel industry. It has directly trained two generations of influential historical researchers, and Foundation-inspired teaching methods and viewpoints have heavily influenced the way that most true temporal researchers approach Downtime. It's even gotten a few of the very worst Uptime offenders and maniacs shut down or locked away (it's also rumored that the Foundation might know a few things about a few rather conveniently-timed deaths). But it's one organization against billions of people and societal inertia; it can't do everything. Although if the Foundation *wasn't* there, things might be much, much worse. Even a program that's just slowing down the inevitable has some merit.

Organization

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation operates out of the SWF Building in Manhattan. The SWF Building is owned by SWF Enterprises, which is majority-owned by Reginald and his parents (who are still alive, and supportive of their son's efforts). SWF Enterprises was originally one of those companies that makes money by having a lot of money to loan out to other companies; under Reginald's leadership it's gotten heavily into manufacturing, on the principle that the Foundation would benefit from having in-house

suppliers for gear. These 'new' businesses are in fact profitable, even after the Foundation's expenses are factored in. SWF Enterprises temporal gear is well regarded among field researchers, including the ones who think of the Foundation as a bunch of bleeding-heart fools.

It is the policy of the Foundation to have a field office in every city where the TSO maintains a public facility; unlike the TSO, the Foundation hires locals for its field offices, and draws globally for its own temporal teams. The Foundation also has a habit of hiring ex-convicts and reformed criminals, as long as they *are* reformed. Or at least have only committed crimes that the Foundation doesn't really care about. There's always a place in a field team for a burglar that was scrupulous about avoiding violence, or who never stole something from a person who couldn't afford it. There's also always a place for researchers, interpreters, observers, and people there to keep Downtimers from killing Uptimers, of course. The Foundation hires the best that they can find who will take the (very respectable) salary, too. Staffing is rarely an issue.

The larger field offices (those equivalent to TSO Beta facilities) have permanent teams of Agents, but all field offices have at least three people who are cleared to go Downtime on Foundation business. The Alpha-facility

equivalents usually have two or three dedicated teams, and the Foundation head office could field up to six teams of six Agents each. The head office typically sends out its own Agents as specialists assigned to other temporal teams, or occasionally in a group as backup for temporal teams that get in trouble. There's no rule about the head office doing regular jobs, but there's usually more important things for those Agents to do.

Business

The business of the Smythe-Worthington Foundation is to provide clients with honest answers to historical questions. That this is profitable is mute testimony to the state of their world today. Not to mention a sharp reminder of the limits to the Foundation's influence.

It all comes down to a perennial conflict: people like to be told what they want to hear, but people also like to be told what's actually going on. Sometimes they're the same people, too. There are also many contemporary disputes and conflicts which ultimately stem from different interpretations of history. Having access to cheap time travel could theoretically finally resolve those disputes -- or it could make those disputes worse, as rival sets of 'evidence' get brought Uptime in order to buttress various positions. At some point, tempers get lost, sharp objects

might get unsheathed, and then it becomes this entire *thing*.

That's why there's a Foundation. It's not amenable to bribes, it's not really invested in any kind of partisan or parochial squabbling, and it doesn't back down in the face of threats. Hire the Foundation to answer a question, and it will -- whether or not you'll personally like the answer. So cash up front, please.

This business model can only really work because time travel is so cheap and easy. The Foundation trades on its reputation as an ethical alternative to badly-trained half-amateurs who will field-strip an entire historical era to give somebody the same information they could find on a data-sharing website. It also doesn't hurt that the Foundation can rely on both SWF Enterprises' nigh-bottomless coffers, and the revenues from selling its branded gear. In fact, without those two advantages, the Foundation might swiftly find itself in very bad financial shape.

Mission Types

Generally, the Foundation does three types of missions: Research, Security, and Cultural. Many missions combine either Research or Security with Cultural; a few officially combine all three. Rather more do so unofficially.

- **Research:** This is the basic “We need the answer to X” sort of mission. It may or may not have a representative from the client along.
- **Security:** These are typically Research missions where the client has their own pet experts, and it’s the Foundation’s job to keep them unmolested while the mission is going on. If everything goes right, Security missions are exquisitely boring. Security missions are rarely boring.
- **Cultural:** These tend to be ad hoc missions where the Foundation is sent in to defuse a Downtime situation involving Uptimers before the TSO decides to resolve a hostage crisis by machine-gunning Babylon. These are unfortunately rarer than the Foundation would like, as many Uptime organizations are fine with bloody rescues, as long as the blood’s all from Downtimers.

Note that at the beginning of the campaign, the Foundation is in a position where it can be choosy about the jobs it takes and the methods under which they will operate. As the campaign world gets worse, the Foundation’s basic ethical paradigm will likely be stress-tested. And the party will likely be helping to direct how the Foundation as a whole reacts to the stress.

Campaign Flavors

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation, as written, doesn't really have much of a cause beyond the not ignoble one of ethically making money while not being total jackasses about it. In a better world it wouldn't need anything more, either. Unfortunately, in the world they live in, society is rotting from access to seemingly consequence-free time travel, and the Foundation will have to react *somehow* to that unfortunate fact. Below are a few potential ways that the Foundation will approach their situation.

Academic Whirl

Here, the Smythe-Worthington Foundation is simply a straight-up time travel campaign, 'historical investigation' flavor. Concentrate on interesting historical puzzles, entertaining Downtime NPCs (both famous and unknown), and derring-do in a world where any non-historical events can be wiped away at the end of the adventure. GMs should reduce the impact of the nastiest aspects of the Uptime World, and never make things any **worse**. Sure, the TSO is useless about keeping Uptimers from wrecking Downtime, but as long as nobody obnoxious appears in the PCs' current portion of the time stream then the nasty bits can be ignored. And if somebody obnoxious *does* show up; well, thwarting a fellow Uptimer is sometimes very satisfying work, too.

The Doom that Came to Uptime

It's all coming down. Uptime isn't content with destroying Downtime; it's going to destroy itself, too, and when it does the nukes and the deaths won't reset themselves when the last Uptimer is dead. When that day happens, the smart play will be to escape Downtime and wait for the apocalypse to burn itself out. And the Foundation is full of people who can call smart plays. Every mission Downtime that the Foundation does also has another, hidden objective: to improve, however incrementally, the Great Plan that the Foundation will activate when the balloons finally do go up. It's not going to be easy, surviving the end of the world with whatever resources that the Foundation can carry with it, and there's going to be other groups with similar goals. But it's the best chance Uptime has.

Peace and Safety of a New Dark Age

It's long been argued that the inevitable introduction of time travel into a timeline would result in the past being changed to the point where time travel was never introduced in the first place, thus stopping time travel. Thus, *the universe itself* is effectively hostile to time travel. This was considered disproven by the current system, which does allow the past to be warped, spindled, and mutilated without it ever slopping over onto the present. But what if that just means that it will take longer for

Uptime to decay to the point where it can no longer travel
Downtime?

Or does that even matter? Time travel is a poisoned fruit. It must be eliminated if humanity is to survive. And that means time travel must be eliminated so thoroughly that it will *never* be attempted again. The goal of the Foundation is to make that happen with as little loss of life and civilization as possible -- but if the end-goal requires that Uptime revert to a medieval lifestyle for a few centuries until time travel becomes a self-evidently absurd myth, then so be it. Better that than the end of *everything*.

Whether or not the PCs are aware of this end-goal is, of course, up to the GM.

Puppets in the Past

The Foundation is a lie. It's a handy lie, and not everybody in the Foundation is in on the joke; but some other Uptime group is *really* in charge, and they're not using the Foundation for benevolent purposes. But why use the Foundation at all? Well, some Uptime idealists and optimists won't work with more pragmatic sorts -- but they'll definitely work with a fellow traveler, and even accept little moral compromises that they never would otherwise. And as long as nobody finds out, everything is fine, right? As long as nobody ever finds out.

Rats in the Time Walls

Someone in the Smythe-Worthington Foundation can *break the rules*. Maybe the Foundation knows how to make permanent changes, or can create stable alternate timelines, or the Foundation has access to the future, somehow. Whatever it is, it's enough to create a secret society inside the Foundation itself. The Foundation's regular missions are cover for its secret ones, whatever they are; it's not always clear what those missions mean in the larger scheme, though. And it's sometimes not clear what the larger scheme even is. On the other hand: being able to break *any* of the **Core Principles of Time Travel** means that certain Uptimer behaviors could be prevented, or avenged, after all. If the PCs are smart about it.

Revenge is a Dish Best Served Yesterday

If nobody else will police the Uptimers, fine: the Foundation will. Well, the worst of the Uptimers, at least. There are two ways to do that: the first is to keep track of the most egregious and powerful Uptime offenders, carefully maneuver them into a situation where their deaths would not discommode 'innocent' Downtimers, and run an operation that gets the Uptimer hoist on his own petard (sometimes literally). Think *Mission: Impossible*, only in the past.

The second methodology is to target the *anonymous* monsters. For every megalomaniac that goes back in time to conquer a pre-gunpowder city and burn it to the ground in an orgy of violence, there's a few serial killers who deal with their inner demons by popping into a random decade and killing a few people until the whispers shut up. Sadists, rapists, bigots of every stripe: Downtime is full of people who can become *amusements*. Uptime simply doesn't care; but Uptime also doesn't care if a Uptimer pedophile is found shot in the head of a Downtime child bordello, either. The trick there is keeping it from being obvious that the deed was done by another Uptimer, but then: that's what local agents are for. And when the timeline gets reset, the Uptimer is still dead. Win-win.

Tattered Refuge

The Smythe-Worthington Foundation is a refuge from the increasing, and increasingly casual, horrors of the outside world. It's just not a perfect one. Oh, for finite periods of time the PCs can forget that it's getting worse and worse out there, but never for long. When other Uptimers intrude, there's always a really good reason why they need to be tolerated, at least for now; and sometimes the Foundation itself is required to do questionable things to get along. But even if it isn't perfect protection from a horrible universe, it is protection, of a sort. And keeping it as safe as possible for as long as possible is a laudable goal.

Part 6: The Whole Thing Comes Crashing Down

The world of the Smythe-Worthington Foundation has been deliberately designed to fall apart whenever the GM is ready for it to fall apart. The existing institutions are unstable, the societal damage to Uptime is only currently controllable, and the evil machinations are still confined to Downtime where they'll be out of the way. Honestly, the campaign world doesn't even have to fall apart at all; the players could end time travel, or change Uptime culture to the point where it either cannot or will not continue to abuse Downtime, or even decide that it's more fun to keep running around mucking with the timestreams until it's time to try another campaign world. There's no wrong way to run the campaign.

But then there's that word 'pre-apocalyptic,' which implies that at some point the world's going to end. There are several ways that could happen, and several ways that groups will react to it. Below are some suggestions on handle both.

How It All Blew Up

NBC Armageddon

It might be hard to justify a chemical warfare apocalypse, but nuclear and biological ones both have a long, distinguished pedigree in science fiction. However, they can have somewhat different triggering mechanisms, not to mention consequences:

- A civilization-ending nuclear exchange is most likely to occur as part of a worldwide 'revolt' against the TSO. It might start as a sneak attack on the nations of the UNSC by everyone else; assuming that non-TSO time travel activity can be hidden (or deliberately ignored by traitors in the monitoring stations), weapons-grade material could be raided from the past, turned into bombs, then used to decapitate the Security Council nations. And if it doesn't work perfectly, then the Security Council nations would then proceed to use their existing nuclear weapons stocks to blow up every world capital and major city on the planet. Assuming that rogue elements in the TSO itself don't just blow up everything. There are enough psychotics and sociopaths steadily acquiring positions of power on Uptime to make such a scenario possible, or even likely.

- Biological Armageddon could also be due to government action, but with enough of a dormancy period someone in the private sector could also plausibly create a superbug, then use a popular Downtime nexus to spread it widely among Downtimers, who would then pass it along to Uptimer tourists, who would then spread it Uptime among too many vectors to allow ring vaccination. Or they could just spread it in a more 'normal' fashion. Either way, a serious outbreak of some sort of apocalypse plague would likely result in a lot of over-reaction and possibly even the cavalier use of nuclear weapons. Plus, of course, the immediate and possibly irreversible breakdown of trust on any level above the tribal/clan level.

Time Vikings

In theory, one thing Uptime *doesn't* have to worry about from Downtime would be an invading army. Where would they get the conveyors? Well, from rebellious Uptimers of the non-UNSC nations, of course. Or Uptimers from one of the UNSC nations trying to take over the TSO (and by extension the world). Or traitorous Uptimers from the TSO itself, staging a coup. Or even from a few intensely charismatic and unhinged Uptimers who managed to set up the Downtime factories needed without the TSO noticing. However it happened, now there are waves of

Downtime barbarians coming Uptime and attacking. It would take remarkably few of them to topple the world order, as long as the enemy can keep choosing where and when to attack.

The Stars Are Right

Not necessarily Cthulhu-style cosmic horror, although there's nothing wrong with that. Perhaps the over-use of time travel merely disrupts causality and increasingly distorts local space-time until large parts of the planet are either uninhabitable, or inhabited by things that do not like humanity. In either case, the nations of Uptime are unlikely to weather the changes in reality well, or indeed at all.

The Peace and Safety of a New Dark Age

Or it simply could happen that Uptime society falls apart on its own, as increased mass psychosis incites wars and destruction and the smashing of institutions. After a certain tipping point, whoever's left will likely and not unreasonably blame time travel for all of their problems, and possibly modern science as well. The successor states will likely be smaller, much more authoritarian, and violently opposed to anyone trying to bring back the old system. Mad Max aesthetic optional, but justifiable.

Surviving Players

The TSO

It is unlikely that the TSO would be totally destroyed, in the sense that all of their personnel were dead and all of their equipment wrecked. Whatever was left would likely fragment further. The various splinters might or might not have a common agenda, past survival and/or escape. They probably still have most of the surviving time travel equipment, which they may or may not be using to take refuge in the past. But even if pieces of the TSO do maintain Downtime boltholes they'll still try to keep a presence Uptime, if only to keep an eye out for Uptimers looking for revenge.

Nation-States

The UNSC nations are almost certainly toast in an end-of-the-world scenario, almost by definition. Small, isolated countries with enough agriculture to feed themselves might fare better. So would larger countries with working time-pads; just go back and keep raiding the same Downtime spot for its harvest. A full time-pad load can feed about two thousand people for a week, but that's in a best case scenario. And time-pads are fragile.

NGOs

Wide range, really. Religious institutions will be making a comeback, particularly if they weren't involved with time travel to any significant degree: some of the faith organizations will be benevolent, and some of them will not. For better or for worse, any organization that survives the Apocalypse will be extremely survival-oriented; they might not necessarily be cruel, but they're not going to be sentimental.