The Monetary Adjustment—Jump #01
(Prime Timeline)

Panem had spent most of her life trying and failing to balance the position above her peers that her scientific abilities had placed her in with the ethics of potentially overstepping her boundaries.

This had been a common occurrence in her life, going all the way back to the playground. While other children were focused on toys, gadgets, and swelling penumbra that would soon become an all-encompassing internet presence, Panem had spent her early years focusing on ways that she might improve, alter, or otherwise tinker with those same exact concepts—although, even in adulthood, she had never quite mastered the art of not looking like a goblin in her Instagram photos.

As her intellectual prowess increased and her talents became noticed by the proper officials, she was given the funding to challenge not only her capabilities, but also what mankind thought it knew about the unknown. Subjects that might have otherwise gone down in the history books as nothing but speculative science fiction had become rungs on a ladder for her to climb as she dedicated her life to the carrot at the end of her proverbial stick—

Referring to, of course, *time travel*.

“…to which I naturally decided that I should be the first *human* subject to travel backwards in time.” Panem said into her tape recorder, “And now that I have confirmed my theories about temporal causality to be correct, I will now venture back into the timestream in order to test my new hypothesis as to whether or not the present can be *altered*.”

Conveniently, Panem decided to leave out the little tidbit in her grand mission statement about going back to try and adjust the timeline *in her favor*—but then, she wanted to be looked upon kindly by future historians.

Panem was the only woman in her lab. Being a highly private theoretical physicist with impossible standards and irregular working habits had made the actual construction of this device more of a chore than it should have been, but now that she had decided that she was going to try and maybe overstep those ethical boundaries just a smidge, it really came in handy.

“In order to access the chamber,” she said in her thick Hindi accent as she placed the recorder down on the table, “You must first turn all exterior knobs to their lowermost position. There is both an exterior and interior display panel, but the interior one acts only as a return pad.”

The machine opened with a hiss as the hydraulics came to life and the top-down door began to lift by the bottom. Panem stepped inside with a deep breath, still easily shaken by the prospect of this concept that she had devoted her life’s work towards, but that she still only *just* felt like she understood.

“I have set the external display panel to the year **[REDACTED]** exactly three solar rotations ago, to the day.”

As she gripped the lever and pulled it down, the door followed suit. Panem’s nerves and conscience began to quiver in the face of once again slipping through the temporal stream, the steel melting from her demeanor in a rare reminder that she was far more human than she let on.

“If I do not return—” Panem said into the inner microphone, “—Please stop the tape and give a copy to my financial backers. And to my parents.”

Placing her palm on the porthole with her fingers spread into a V and the thumb outstretched, Panem proudly and eloquently said her eulogy—words that she had learned to live by.

“May you all live long and prosper.”

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And in a flash of light, the brief melodrama of it all seemed quite silly.

She had survived this time just as she had the last one. Completely intact and not turned into a pile of goo, as her theories had purported was a… *distinct* possibility. One that she had once bravely decided to risk in the name of higher learning, now one that she took in the name of

1. Establishing that the conclusion that she had come to regarding time-travel was not a one-time occurrence.
2. Furthering her monetary presence within this experiment.

When she had first taken on this job, it had been at the behest of a private scientific institute that had paid her handsomely for the exclusivity of her brilliance. But three years ago—the “now” that she had currently found herself in—they had offered her a mouth-wateringly large bonus if she could show them further, more concrete evidence of her theories.

At the time (“ha!”) she hadn’t been able to provide such evidence. And though she couldn’t do anything to upset the natural evolution of the machine, she *could* leave that evidence for her younger self to find…

“Should I leave a note?” Panem scrunched her face as she spoke aloud to the empty office, “No, that seems too personal of a touch. She… *I*… would almost certainly disregard it as a joke.”

Scouring the messy desk, careful not to touch anything lest she run the risk of upsetting the delicate process of her brilliant mind, Panem carefully began to navigate the dry-erase markers and picked a few key colors that would correspond with the notes on her various whiteboards.

“Just a few minor corrections—nothing that will give me the answer *too soon*, but one that will give me the answer to observing tachyons more clearly…”

Certainly that would be enough to impress the board? The first time that they had seen this, they had nearly browned their lab coats. But since it had come from a team of scientists, Panem hadn’t been able to leverage it for more money for her facilities.

“There—that should be more than enough to give myself a stronger footing among the scientific community!”

Putting the markers back, Panem heard the distinct click of her laboratory door opening. Doing a quick scan of her desk area, the older Panem was out of the room in a flash before the younger one even knew that her office had been touched by what was almost assuredly a much duller future than the one that she now had to look forward to…

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The Chicken Sandwich Complication—Jump #02

Stepping out of the time machine, Panem was far more overjoyed with the fact that she had not returned to a world in turmoil than she let on.

However, the thickness of her legs and the sudden heaviness that she felt was troubling. She had not experienced any side effects of temporal travel in her previous dip into the timestream, but then she had only just barely passed the twenty-four-hour threshold. Going back a whole three years may have had unprecedented side-effects on her physical form that—

“Great Scott!”

Panem’s cursory look downwards shed some new light on the issue. During the time that it had taken for her to step into the machine, make her minor alterations, and step back out, the timestream had adjusted itself that she was at least fifty pounds heavier than when she had left!

“What in the world is happening here?” Panem wondered aloud with a few investigative squeezes of her fleshy tum beneath the dull blouse that had grown with her in size, “I have never had a problem with my weight…”

Looking around her office, things became a bit clearer. The trash can in the corner was full of junk food wrappers and containers instead of her usual fare of the bare minimum, because she was too busy working to remember to eat. Having more funding in the project must have meant backing from the Military… which meant the government contracts with fast food companies must have hitched a ride into the building.

“Ugh! This simply won’t do at all.” Panem’s round face dimpled at the cheeks as she put her hands on her hips, “I have never been so disappointed in myself—who knew that I would be so susceptible to the path of least resistance?”

Panem sighed, shook her head, and steeled herself. This was only a minor hiccup. And as a scientist, she knew that the best solutions were often the simplest. There must have been a way for her to keep the bonus that came with more solid evidence of her hypothesis three years prior *without* sacrificing her girlish figure for it. She just had to find the correct parameters for that outcome to occur.

“I will simply go back to a date after my last chronal jump, make another small alteration, and then come back to the present.”

Working through the process of initializing her machine once more, Panem relayed an abbreviated version of her prior sentiments, denoted on the still-running tape recorder the updated coordinates along the temporal plane, pulled down the door, and found herself awash in the time stream once again.

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“There—the compound’s health and wellness center will finally make itself of some use to me.”

Panem had never been a vain woman. But the thought of anybody recognizing her underneath all of this flab had been mortifying. She had put on dark sunglasses and tied her hair up so that nobody would put two and two together and think that the brilliant, beautiful and mysterious Hindi scientist on the upper floors had somehow locked herself in a bakery for months at a time before making a daring escape.

She had come back in time to see her hypothesis had been proven correct, at least. Just a few weeks into the new contract, and the compound was already beginning construction in its eatery. Since it was on auto-draft and she hadn’t changed banks since she was nineteen, it should be as simple as leaving the passkey to the wellness center in a noticeable area back in her office.

“But where do I always look that isn’t a bit cluttered?”

Panem looked around her past self’s office to see that the changes had already begun. The remains of a chicken sandwich wrapper had been found in her waste bin. Ugh—to think that she would ever be so susceptible to such a thing!

“I know—I’ll put this on top of the mini-fridge, where I keep my yogurt.” Panem pointed a finger high as she narrated aloud, “With a small note about it coming in the contract…”

Panem thought to the auto-draft fee.

“Perhaps I should say “discounted”?” she scrunched her face in thought, “I may notice the charge, but it’s not like I know the price of the gym membership here… obviously.”

Panem looked down to squeeze her tummy derogatorily. Her chubby face creased into another frown. It was so strange, being this heavy! She certainly hoped that having a gym membership would be incentive for her to get her past self’s lazy posterior in gear! The fact that cancelling it would have to be done through a bunch of greedy government officials would have made it even more convincing to just go, rather than fight it, right?

She *really* didn’t want to have to lose it herself. That sounded *exhausting*.

“Well, that’s one of the benefits of time travel, I suppose.” Panem clicked her tongue and chuckled to herself, “Immediate gratification is finally within my grasp!”

Stepping back into the machine in her lab, Panem adjusted the knobs and pulled the lever, confident that this one little push in the right direction would be just the thing that she needed to be able to enjoy being fabulously wealthy and back to her old self.

“Maybe I will return with a few more muscles!” she squeezed her fleshy bicep as the machine whirred to life, “It would be a nice change of pace after being so doughy.”

The time machine’s hydraulics hissed and it began to glow, slowly receding into the temporal plane and out of its current existence; returning to the point in time from where it had originated from in this, the timeline twice altered by the passenger inside…

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The Gym Membership Revision—Jump #03

“Welcome back Doctor Babha!” was the first thing that greeted Panem when she had returned to the present. Something that understandably alarmed her because, when she had left, her lab had been empty.

“Great Scott—” Panem hissed, clutching her chest in surprise, “—Don’t *scare me* like that Margaret!”

The fact that the name had come out of her mouth at all had been another big red siren going off in her head, because she did not know this woman. Nor would she have ever had an assistant witness what she was doing here in the first place, given the… moral ambiguity of trying to better oneself through time travel.

And then there was the issue of the fact that she had been able to grab a *lot* of chest.

She hadn’t lost any weight at all! In fact, she was bigger than ever! How had going back in time to give herself a gym membership forced her to *gain* fifty more pounds?! She felt like a blimp! The shock of seeing another person in her lab had made her break out into a cold sweat, which just accentuated the fact that her double chin was now a permanent crease on her face. She could feel her stomach sinking low into her khakis, buttoned over her burgeoning belly. Even her lab coat felt tight!

“Were you able to avert your accident?”

“Ah! Yes! My… accident!” Panem played along as coolly as her pathetic people skills allowed her to, “That is *definitely* why I went back in time. Yes.”

“Oh no, is your leg still bothering you?” the strange Hispanic woman in her office frowned, “Did your experiment not work?”

Leg? Margaret had never experienced any pains in her leg befo—

And then, her subconscious memories brought it back to her. She had gone to the gym, as her future self had intended. But because of her inexperience with the equipment and reluctance to ask for help (or pay a trainer) she had put herself in a cast for six months. That must have been when the compound assigned Margaret to work with her, to help her around the lab. Not moving around, plus a still undeterred love of greasy takeout food must have…

“Ughhh…” Panem puffed angrily, “This is so very frustrating.”

“I know, Doctor.” Margaret smiled empathetically, “But if anyone can figure out a way for you to avoid your accident, it’s you—I wouldn’t be helping you right now if I didn’t think that it was for a good cause, under the most brilliant and capable doctor that I know.”

Well… at least she had an assistant who understood how intelligent she was.

“Let us try again.” Panem sighed, “Set the time for the day of my accident, a few hours before. I think I know what I have to do.”

“Of course, Doctor!”

Panem groaned as her stomach roared. All of this time-traveling was making her hungry…

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“Okay.” Panem smacked her lips as she gripped a Ch’king sandwich with her free hand, “This should work.”

Confound these cravings—who could have known that three odd years of junk food would have left her with such little willpower and such a *vast* appetite? And so suddenly! She had been hoping that the adjustments to the compound’s eatery would be complete during the temporal transit, and she hadn’t been disappointed. Rationalizing that she often thought better on a full stomach, it would be worth the small diversion.

Taking another big bite, Panem wiped the excess schmutz off on the billowing apron of belly that hung from her waist. A habit that she was willing to chalk up to further alterations in the timestream.

“If this is the day of my accident, all I have to do is keep myself from going to the gym.” Panem shifted on her fleshy hip as she made her way to her whiteboard, “I cannot alter anything that would lead to the creation of the time machine, but I can at least make something of a mess that would distract my previous self for long enough to miss the gym today…”

Looking around her office, still relatively unchanged in three years owing to Panem being a creature of habit, she found herself at a loss as to what she could actually mess up without putting the progress of the time machine in jeopardy.

“Hmm…” she placed a fat finger to her double chin in contemplation, “Oh! I know!”

Panem hip-checked the desk and a glass of water that had been left unattended teetered over, running all over the paper copies of her notes that had been transcribed to the whiteboard. Surely, her compulsive need to keep hard copies of her work would drive her past self to stay home today?

“Ooh, that hurt.” Panem winced at the thought of messing up her own workplace, “But, in the name of science, we must all make sacrifices.”

Panem reached into the mini-fridge on the counter to steal a yogurt and a plastic spoon from the cubbard near it.

“It is for my own good.” She ripped the top off, “Obviously, I do not need the extra calories tempting me.”

The longer that she dealt with the extra weight, the more natural it felt. A troubling thought, at the least. Her thighs still chafed and she grew winded with the effort of hauling herself around the compound during her excursion, but the changes to the timestream had made it so that she knew how to deal with it.

“Hopefully, I will forget how to be fat just as quickly as I learned it.” Panem said concisely as she stepped into the time machine, “I have much more pressing matters to attend to, and learning to curtail my appetite is not one of them!”

Panem looked into her hand and saw the empty yogurt cup.

“Oh, apologies.” She said to nobody as she tossed the yogurt cup onto the carpeted ground below, “We’ll just… add that to the mess.”

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