

## **Chapter 5**

Dave would never forget his first experience traveling through a portal. Stepping through the event horizon was walking into absolute blackness. As his body gradually entered, he felt his body stretched between the dark wormhole and the room he was leaving. Dave could still feel the air in the room on his right leg which had not yet crossed the horizon. The rest of his body was immersed in the absolute darkness, with no sensation of breeze, heat or cold, just black. He could feel the hair on the back of his neck standing up as though he had rubbed his feet on a carpet and was bracing for the zap of static electricity. As his back leg fully crossed the event horizon, Dave felt a momentary stillness and loneliness, as though he was the only person in the entire universe. A light appeared in front of him, growing stronger and larger as it rapidly approached. Dave was very apprehensive and wondered what he could do to avoid being overtaken by it, but he felt suspended in the black without walls or floor or ceiling and couldn't move in any direction. The light resolved into a seven foot circle of light just in front of him. He had been told that this would be the other end of the portal, and he would have to step through it in order to reach his destination. He moved through it, and he felt the warm air and light touching his body and the portal stretching him as though trying to keep him in its sinister embrace. And then, he was out.

Charlie had stepped into the portal just before Dave and was waiting in the room with Muncie and Rence. He smiled broadly, but held a bucket out to him in case his stomach had not made it through yet. "Dave, see, I told you it was easy. By the way, welcome to 3186."

"You know, I lost all perspective on distance and time in that thing," Dave replied. "How long did that take?"

"You took one step in, and one step out. How long does that take? One second perhaps?" Charlie said. "The wormhole doesn't exist in the universe. It's just a tunnel between two spots. Since you were momentarily out of the space-time reality, there was no time to

be measured. Pretty cool, though? Come on, let's take a look around.

"Where is this place, Muncie?" Dave asked. "Did we travel to another planet or anything like that?"

"Sorry, Dave, we're still in San Diego," Muncie apologized. "We're downtown at City Hall. We're introducing you to some important folks today. I hope you're ready." They exited the room and entered a long hallway. Along one side were windows looking out on the city. The city seemed not that different after eleven hundred years. The buildings were taller, and vehicles seemed to be zipping along both on the streets and in the air above. But it was not like a science fiction movie. Dave was still amazed at how similar all of the people looked. The men all seemed very handsome and the women beautiful, but too similar. They were all quite tall as well. Rence, who was about six feet tall, seemed to be fairly short by their standards. Dave was at least glad to be an inch or two taller than Charlie. The group turned right into a short hall, at the end of which was a sign that read "Office of the Mayor." They opened the door and entered.

The mayor's assistant rose and asked them to sit down while she checked if the group was ready for them. Her name was Lia, and she looked much like the others of this time, except she oddly had blue eyes. She pressed a contact on her headset and waited. Then she stepped to the door and opened it for them. "You may go in now," she said. Charlie walked in just ahead of Dave. Dave thought he heard Lia say "Hi, Dad" to Charlie as he passed. He would have to ask him about that later.

The mayor's conference room was massive. Twenty chairs sat around a thick glass table. One wall was a large window and offered a perfect view of San Diego Bay. On the opposite wall were portraits of previous mayors of the city. Five individuals stood and walked up to them and were introduced to Dave. The first was his host, Mayor Vitek Volomon of San Diego, who warmly shook his hand and welcomed Dave to the future. Next, was Chief Engineer Lanz Lagerfeld, who was responsible for time and space travel. Admiral Arrin Adamsen welcomed him as well. He was charged

with the expansion of space exploration and colonization. The final human to be introduced was Bishop Itzak Ibrahim. The Bishop was on the High Council for Humanity which provided leadership for the entire civilization. He would lead the meeting. The last one to be introduced was not human, but not that different either. He was only four and one-half feet tall with bright blue skin. His eyes were black as coal and twice the size of human eyes. His flat nose seemed almost to disappear between those blinking eyes. He wore a long cloak of shimmery, silver fabric.

“Hello Dave, I am Mencius the Kalidean,” he began with a low rumble of a voice. “I am very glad that our mutual friend Charlie convinced you to be with us today. It’s not that often that we meet our ancestors, or even people from other planets, like me. I can imagine that this is quite a shock.”

“Yes, sir,” Dave stuttered, “it is an honor to meet all of you.”

“Just call me Mencius, Dave,” he said and motioned for all to take their places at the table. “We have no need for formalities here. Those are all remnants of the past.”

“Mencius,” Mayor Vitek broke in. “I will leave you to your guests. I know I am not needed for the meeting. If you require anything, please let Lia know, she is at your disposal.” He came up to Dave again and offered his hand. Dave stood and shook it firmly. “Dave, please enjoy your visit to our time. If you are free later, I would love to hear more about this great city in your time.” The mayor smiled again and left.

As they sat, Lia and a couple others came in and filled water glasses and placed plates of fruit and cookies around the table. They slipped out as quickly as they had come in.

“Let’s cut to the chase then,” Admiral Arrin began, “Muncie, why do you need Dave? I mean, he seems like a nice guy, but what does he offer that a general or war hero wouldn’t?” He glanced at Dave, saying “No offense to you Dave.”

“Frankly Arrin,” Muncie began, “we cheated. We know it is against policy, but Rence and Aria jumped ahead a few hundred years and see what happened.”

Bishop Itzak jumped to his feet, “This is outrageous! Everyone knows that the future is not set. Any of a trillion minor events now or tomorrow could change it forever. Not only has your team broken every law in the book, but there is no guarantee that what they saw will really happen.” Now he stared angrily at Muncie, “How could you let something like this happen?”

“Calm down everyone,” Lanz interjected. “It was my idea to jump forward, and I convinced Rence and Aria to do it without telling Muncie until after it was over.” Everyone sat again. “We have to remember what made humanity great in the first place. We can’t always follow the rules. Sometimes the rules need to be ignored in order for great progress to be made. I sent them separately, and several weeks apart. The results were almost identical in both trips. Sure, some details changed, as the Bishop rightly notes must happen in a living universe. But in my mind, the results were too similar to blame on a minor wrinkle in space-time.” He grabbed a cookie and munched at it eagerly.

Charlie had his hand on Dave’s shoulder. Dave seemed to be at a tennis match with his head snapping from side to side as the people argued about him. “Okay, I’m game,” Charlie said, motioning to Lanz, “what were those results?” There were multiple nodding heads from others to hear the story.

“Rence went first, about two months ago,” he began. “He jumped five hundred years and stayed there for about two weeks. He found that humanity has expanded to two thousand planets. There were a number of historical references to David the Conqueror and Brewster the Magnificent. The photographic evidence shows conclusively that Dave here is our man.”

“Excuse me,” Dave asked, “Are you telling me that I’m some kind of warlord or something? I’m a laid-off accountant from San Diego. Maybe you have the wrong man?”

“Let Lanz finish Dave,” Mencius said. “I know this is all very hard to believe, even for me. But let us hear the evidence and we can make a mutual decision on how to proceed.” He smiled warmly at Dave, who felt some relief from the call for reason.

“I sent Aria one month later, on two different jumps,” said Lanz. “On the first one, I had her arrive two weeks before Rence did on his jump. That was to test if his jump had affected the history he saw. She only stayed two days and focused on history books and videos. She saw the same things Rence would see when he arrived. Then I sent her again for two weeks to a time 800 years ahead of us. Not much had changed about the story. At that time, humanity exists on seven thousand worlds. There was no mention of Dave the Conqueror. The history at that time speaks of David the Wise and Dave the Founder of a Thousand Worlds.”

“And the video evidence, Lanz?” Mencius asked. “May we see some of it?”

Lanz pressed a button on the communicator and asked Lia to start the presentation. The window wall turned opaque and a screen opened on one of the smaller walls. Having been advised by his assistant, Mayor Vitek rejoined the meeting to see the presentation. After a couple of slides specifying the security of the records, it began.

A booming voice filled the room, “In the late 3100s, Mencius the Kalidean helped mankind rekindle the spirit of adventure and exploration. After centuries of stagnation, mankind sought out the best from their past and called Dave the Conqueror, Charlie the Wise and many others to join them and spread humanity throughout the cosmos.” A picture of a group of people, along with Mencius, standing on a large balcony came into view. “In this picture we see Dave the Conqueror meeting with the High Council of Humanity to accept the position of High Explorer and Founder of Worlds in 3186.” The scene dissolved to a close-up of Dave with Mencius and Itzak on that balcony.

Now Dave really did need that bucket that Charlie had held for him. This had to be a dream. None of this could be true. He wished he was unemployed at home. At least Darlene would be there to hold his hand.

“That video was produced in 3702,” Lanz added. The video cards in front of you show the rest of the data we gathered. “Charlie and Dave, our engineers have written the same things onto a DVD

that you can look at back home. Please don't let anyone else see this yet. I'm sure you have been advised not to talk about any of this until an appropriate time."

The presentation continued for some time. Dave felt himself spiraling out of control. He was about to be asked to leave his family and life for something totally foreign. He was having a hard enough time taking care of his family now. How could they expect him to fix all of humanity? The announcer said something about the starship Texas leaving on its maiden voyage of exploration, which made Dave look up. There, on the bridge of the ship next to him, holding his hand tightly was Darlene. He could also see Charlie and Aria in the picture. Everyone was smiling. It seemed okay now. He was with the love of his life; and with Darlene around, he knew that everything was going to be fine.

As Charlie and Dave walked back down the hallway toward the portal room, Charlie draped his arm around Dave's shoulders. "Hey, buddy, are you doing all right?" he said. "I know this was a huge surprise for you. Just remember it is your decision. There is no right or wrong or good or bad in the universe. Things just are. If you decide to do this thing, that will be fantastic. If not, that's okay too. The future of the universe isn't written yet. If you stay in 2012, that will be the future. If you come to 3186, that will be the future. You can always go back. It's like your kids, Bill and Cybil right? They moved out of town and now everyone has to travel around to see each other. You can travel to visit them too. Now it's across space and time, but you've already done that once. And you didn't even throw up like me. That makes you twice the man as me already, and you haven't even made up your mind yet. After all, I may become Charlie the Wise, but you could be Dave the Founder of Worlds! That is pretty awesome, friend."

"It certainly sounds amazing," Dave replied. "I don't think of myself as a Founder of Worlds though. Do you think I could do it Charlie?"

"Dave," he said as they turned into the portal room, "what I think doesn't matter. You've already seen evidence that it is true. You saw your own picture and you saw Darlene with you on that

ship, ready to face new adventures. You know, I could use a coffee. How about we return to the Starbucks at the same time we left and have a break?"

Dave nodded in agreement. Once the operator initiated the portal, Dave looked around again at the future of San Diego. He could see Mencius walking by, who stopped and waved at Dave before continuing. Dave smiled, and stepped back into absolute black and onto the sidewalk outside the coffee shop.