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Opening extract from

Pendragon The Pilgrims of Rayne

Written by

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For my brother,
TG

PREFACE

Hello everyone.

It's that time again. Time to find a gate, leap into the flume, and travel through the next chapter in the saga of Bobby Pendragon. For those of you who have been following the adventure, you know that Saint Dane's plan for the ultimate conquest of Halla is beginning to take shape. For those of you who are new, well, umm, Saint Dane's plan for the ultimate conquest of Halla is beginning to take shape. Duh. Of course since you're new, you have no idea what that means so I'd strongly recommend that you get with the program and start reading from the beginning! C'mon! I'll wait. (Taps toes, whistles, plays solitaire)

Sorry, can't wait. Gotta go.

As always, before we jump into the flume I want to take a little time to thank some of the many people who help me bring Bobby's story to you. For many years now, the great folks at Simon & Schuster have been incredible supporters of the Pendragon books. Julia Richardson's guidance has once again proved invaluable. Rick Richter, Rubin Pfeffer, Ellen Krieger, Elizabeth Law, Paul Crichton, the folks in design and promotion and marketing and sales and and and . . . the list would add another chapter to this book. I'd like them all to know how grateful I am for their support, talent, and wisdom.

I'd also like to thank the many editors and publishers of all the foreign language editions who have helped turn Pendragon into an international presence. The number of non-English publishers is ever growing. I'm thrilled and grateful for that.

Heidi Hellmich has once again done a masterful job of copyediting. I'm beginning to think she knows more about Bobby than I do. Strange. Thanks, Heidi.

My personal team of acolytes always has my undying gratitude. Without Richard Curtis, Danny Baror and Peter Nelson I might still be writing these words, but I'm not sure how many people would be reading them. Thanks guys.

Though there are many Pendragon readers around the world, I sometimes feel as if I'm writing for an audience of one. My wife, Evangeline. She is always the first to learn of each new danger and dilemma facing the Travelers. Her opinion means the world to me. As long as she's happy, I'm happy. And I'm thinking you will be too. It's worked so far!

I look forward to the day when my daughter, Keaton, will be able to read my stories. I think. I often wonder how she'll react when she figures out that the guy who gives her a bath, gets her dressed, plays hide and seek and reads books to her is actually some nutjob who is able to concoct stories about the potential destruction of all that exists. Until that day, I'll just have to thank her for not running into my office too often to disturb my plotting of inter-dimensional strife.

While traveling (the nonflume kind) to talk about the books, I've had the good fortune to meet many terrific booksellers, teachers and librarians from all over who have played a huge role in bringing Bobby's story to you. Parents fall into that category, too. I owe them all a great debt of gratitude.

Finally, without readers like you, there would be no Pendragon. As many of you know, I love getting letters

and e-mails hearing of your experiences and thoughts while reading my books. It's a wonderful feeling to know that my words can mean so much to you. I'm honored. Thank you.

I think that covers most everybody. Now let's get to the good stuff. The last time we were all together, Bobby returned home to discover that Second Earth had changed. New and impossible technology had suddenly appeared, not the least of which was a talking, mechanical cat that was manufactured by the Dimond Alpha Digital Corporation. Yeah, Dimond. *That* Dimond. Mark was gone. He no longer wanted to be an acolyte and jumped into the flume. But to go where? He left Courtney with the responsibility of the ring and the mystery of what he was planning to do. Bobby's task was clear. He had to find Mark and figure out what he might do that would put Halla square into the sights of Saint Dane.

If you haven't been reading these books, aren't you a little bit interested in what the heck I'm talking about? C'mon, admit it. Go on back. Pick up *The Merchant of Death*. Get up to speed and then come here to find out how Bobby and the Travelers are about to go to the wall in a desperate attempt to stop the destruction of all that ever was, or will be.

For everybody else . . . hobey ho, let's go.
D. J. MacHale

JOURNAL #28

FIRST EARTH

The future isn't what it used to be.

I know that makes no sense. What else is new? There isn't a whole lot that has made sense since I left home three years ago to try and stop a shape-shifting demon who is bent on destroying all humanity. At least I think it was three years ago. It's hard to tell when you're out of your mind. And space. And time. My name is Bobby Pendragon. I'm a Traveler. The lead Traveler, in fact. The Travelers' job is to stop this guy named Saint Dane from changing the natural destiny of the ten territories of Halla and plunging them into chaos.

Do I have your attention yet? Stick around. It gets worse.

The Travelers' mission is to protect Halla. Halla is everything. The normal and the exceptional, the common and the impossible. Halla is all that ever was and all that will be. I know, sounds like a bad sci-fi movie. I'd think so too if I weren't living it. Every day. When I left home I was an ordinary fourteen-year-old guy whose biggest worry was whether or not Courtney Chetwynde liked me . . . and if she'd notice the zit that erupted in the middle of my forehead like some third freakin' eye. Now I'm seventeen and the leader of a

group that must protect the well-being of eternity. The future is in my hands. The past is in my hands. There's nobody else who can stop Saint Dane.

Kind of makes the whole zit-on-the-forehead thing seem kind of lame, doesn't it?

Why Saint Dane calls himself "Saint" is a mystery to me. He is anything but. He isn't even human. At first I thought he was pure evil, just for evil's sake. But the more I learn about him, the more I realize there's something else that drives him. It's hard to explain because I don't understand it myself, but I've come to think that for some twisted reason, Saint Dane believes what he's doing is right. I know, how can a guy who is pushing societies toward cataclysmic disaster possibly believe what he's doing could be *justified*? When I find that answer, I'll unravel the entire mystery of what has happened to me. Why was I chosen to be a Traveler? What happened to my family? Where did Saint Dane come from? Why does he have these incredible shape-shifting powers? What did he mean when he said all the Travelers were illusions? (I've lost sleep over that one.) What is this all leading to?

Saint Dane talks about something called the "Convergence." I have no idea what it is, and I'm not entirely sure I want to. But I have to. Is it something Saint Dane is creating or was it destined to happen anyway? No clue. The only thing I know is that it's up to the Travelers to make sure whatever the Convergence is, it won't come out the way Saint Dane wants it to. It's the only way to be sure that Halla will continue to exist the way we know it. The way it was supposed to be.

I write these journals for two reasons. One is to document what has happened to me for the ages. You know, history and all that. A thousand—no, a million years from now I believe it will be important for people to know what happened. The

other reason is to let my best friends from back home know what's going on with me. Mark Dimond and Courtney Chetwynde are the only people from Second Earth who know the truth.

But things have changed. Mark is missing. Worse, I'm afraid he started a chain reaction that caused serious damage throughout Halla. The cultures of the territories are not supposed to be mixed. I've learned that the hard way more than once. Okay, a lot more than once. Territories have their own distinct destinies that must be played out. Mixing the territories creates havoc. Saint Dane likes havoc. He's mixed the territories at every opportunity, and I believe he has gotten Mark to unwittingly help him do it again. At least I hope it's been unwitting. The alternative is unthinkable. I wish I had never gotten my friend involved in all this by sending him my journals.

As for Courtney Chetwynde, she's with me now. Together we've got to find Mark and try to undo the damage. Courtney and I have come a long way since we were childhood rivals. She is my acolyte and she is one of my best friends. Same as with Mark, I wish she weren't involved in any of this. She's been through hell. But we can't look back. We've got to keep moving ahead, which in some ways means looking back. Don't worry, that will make sense as you keep reading. I think.

With Mark missing and Courtney with me, I have no one to send these journals to. But I have to keep writing. For history's sake, as well as my own. Yes, there's a third reason why I write them. They help keep me sane. They allow me to look back and try to make sense of it all. The whole "making sense" part hasn't worked so well, but the keeping me sane part is a good thing.

I don't know who you are, reader, or how my journal

ended up in your hands. I hope that you've already seen my earlier journals, because I'm not going to repeat everything that has happened. Those early journals, starting with #1 (duh), contain the whole story. If you haven't seen them, go to the National Bank of Stony Brook in Stony Brook, Connecticut. Second Earth. My hometown. There's a safe-deposit box there registered to Bobby Pendragon. That's where my journals are kept. Find a way to get them and guard them with your life. They contain a story that, when complete, will tell of the events leading up to the destruction or the salvation of all that exists. Of Halla. It's a real page-turner, if I do say so myself.

As I write this, Courtney and I have traveled to Third Earth. Our home world in the year 5010. That's three thousand years in the future from the time when we were born. This is where we hope to find answers. This is where we hope to find Mark. After being here for only a short time, we've quickly discovered a scary fact.

The future isn't what it used to be.

This is where the next chapter in my adventure begins.

And so we go.

JOURNAL #28

(CONTINUED)

FIRST EARTH

I hope I haven't made a huge mistake by leaving Second Earth with Courtney Chetwynde.

She isn't a Traveler. Only Travelers are supposed to use the flumes—the highways between territories. I learned that lesson when Mark and Courtney traveled to Eelong on their own. The flume there collapsed, trapping the Travelers Spader and Gunny and killing the Traveler Kasha. Since then I learned that as long as someone uses the flume with a Traveler, nothing bad will happen. At least, nothing bad to the flume. What happens to the future of a territory once a non-Traveler gets there is a whole nother issue. Like I wrote, territories are not supposed to be mixed.

Which is exactly why Saint Dane has been doing it.

He's deliberately brought people and technology and even animals from one territory to another. I don't know if that has been his plan all along, but he's definitely going for it now, and things are getting whacked. When he won Quillan, I'm afraid he tipped the balance of the war for Halla. He's winning. I feel

it. It's not that I'm getting desperate, but it's time to level the playing field. Maybe I've waited too long already. Why do the good guys always have to play by the rules while the bad guy does whatever he wants? Where is that written? It's not like I want to start messing with the territories randomly. No way. But if I can gain an advantage over Saint Dane by bringing an element from one territory to another, I'm going to do it.

Right now, that element is Courtney Chetwynde.

Things have gone strange on Second Earth. History has changed. Technology has changed. Whatever caused it has something to do with Saint Dane's plan for our home territory. Courtney is the one person who can help unravel the mystery of what happened. Together we're going to learn the truth and try to make things right. The future of Halla is at stake. The future of Second Earth is at stake.

The future of Mark Dimond is at stake.

Am I making a mistake by bringing her? I don't know. Uncle Press always warned me about mixing the territories, but he isn't here anymore. Is it the right choice? I won't know until the ultimate battle is over and the Travelers have won.

Or lost.

During the journey, Courtney and I floated next to each other on the magical cushion of air that sped us through the flume. We both wore jeans, low hikers, and T-shirts. You know, your basic Second Earth uniform. I had to admit, Courtney never looked better. She'd grown up since I saw her last. I guess we all have. Her incredibly long brown hair was tied back in a practical braid. Her big gray eyes sparkled, reflecting the light from the stars beyond the crystal walls of the flume. I remembered the very first time I saw her. It was at recess the first day of kindergarten. I decided to pick up the dodgeball she had been playing with. She decided to punch me in the head.

"Don't touch my stuff," she scolded, and grabbed the ball back.

I should have been ticked, but something about her playful smile told me she wasn't your typical playground bully. I held back my tears, smiled, and said, "Don't start a fight you can't win." I grabbed the ball and ran away. She took off after me and chased me through the busy playground for the next ten minutes. By the time we stopped, exhausted, we were laughing. That began a love-hate relationship that has lasted to this day. We were always friendly rivals, trying to outdo each other in sports. Sometimes she'd win, other times it would be me. Neither of us really felt superior, but that didn't stop us from trying. The strange thing was that over those years our rivalry turned into serious affection. The night I left home with Uncle Press to become a Traveler, Courtney and I kissed for the first time.

So much had happened since that night. We were different people. As we floated through the flume, I saw it in her eyes—she was older. But "older" didn't really cover it. We'd both seen things that no kid should have to. No adult, either. The fourteen-year-old kids who kissed that night were long gone. We were the keepers of Halla now.

Courtney explained to me what happened when she followed Mark's instructions and went to the flume in the basement of the Sherwood house. Mark had left his Traveler ring for her. When she saw it, she realized the frightening truth. Mark had jumped into the flume. But where had he gone? And why? Mark no longer wanted to be an acolyte, that much was clear, because he left his ring. The flume wasn't damaged, which meant he'd left with a Traveler. But who? Could it have been Saint Dane? Not knowing what else to do, Courtney put on the ring. The flume sprang to life. Seconds later Saint Dane

himself blasted out of the tunnel between territories and added yet another twist to the mystery by revealing a disturbing truth.

He had been with us on Second Earth our entire lives.

"It's so strange," Courtney said as we flew along. "Can you believe Saint Dane was Andy Mitchell from the beginning?"

"Yes," I replied flatly.

"Well, it surprised the hell out of me. He's been watching us our whole lives, Bobby. How creepy is that? He's been setting us up."

"No," I corrected. "He's been setting Mark up."

The cruel truth of what Saint Dane had been doing on Second Earth was finally revealed. Sort of. He became a person named Andy Mitchell, a low-life bully who harassed Mark for years. After I left home to become a Traveler, Andy Mitchell showed Mark another side of his personality. He turned out to be smart. Incredibly smart. He joined Mark's science club, which at first freaked Mark out. Courtney told me how it seemed impossible that a nimrod like Andy could suddenly become brilliant. But Mark believed. Soon the victim was drawn to the tormentor.

"That's how he works," I reminded Courtney. "He pretends to be a friend and lures you into doing things you think are right, but lead to disaster. He takes pride in that. He says that whatever happens isn't his doing. He believes the people of the territories make their own decisions."

"That's so bogus," Courtney snapped. "How can people make their own decisions when he's pushing them the wrong way?"

"Exactly. On Second Earth, he pushed Mark."

Andy Mitchell and Mark worked on a science project they named "Forge." It was a small, plastic ball with a computer-

driven skeleton that would change shapes when given verbal commands. They were about to fly to Florida to enter a national science contest when Andy asked Mark to stay behind to help him clean out his uncle's florist shop that had been wrecked in a flood. Mark's parents flew to Florida without them.

Mr. and Mrs. Dimond never made it. Their plane disappeared over the Atlantic. Everyone on board was lost. Saint Dane had a hand in that tragedy. No doubt. He killed Mark's parents.

Courtney continued, "Saving First Earth didn't change things, Bobby. Saint Dane is coming after Second Earth. And Third Earth."

"I figured that."

"Whatever he's planning has to do with Mark," Courtney added. "He said their relationship had entered a whole new phase. What was that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "But I think there's a pretty good clue in what happened next."

Second Earth changed. That's the simple way of putting it. It changed. Saint Dane jumped into the flume and Courtney got pulled in after him. Rather than being swept to another territory, Courtney was dumped right back in the cellar of the Sherwood house, where she'd started. But it wasn't the same place she had left only moments before. Second Earth had changed. Courtney quickly recognized strange differences, mostly to do with technology. She returned home to find a computer that was way more elaborate than anything she'd ever seen, and a robotic talking cat that nearly sent her off the deep end. Kinda freaked me out when I saw it too. We discovered it was manufactured by a company called the Dimond Alpha Digital Organization. DADO. It may have been a

coincidence, but the robots on Quillan were called dados. That, along with the fact that the company that made the mechanical cat shared the same name as Mark, meant the coincidences were piling up a little too high to be coincidences anymore.

"I think when you did a boomerang through the flume, the history of Second Earth was changed," I concluded. "And since you were in the flume, you weren't changed along with it. You still remembered what the old Second Earth was like."

"Probably because Saint Dane wanted me to remember."

"Probably," I agreed. "I think Saint Dane used Mark to help create a new technology that is somehow going to lead to the turning point of Second Earth. Killing the Dimonds made Mark emotionally vulnerable. Who knows what Saint Dane told him to get him to leave Second Earth?"

"Still," Courtney countered. "I can't believe Mark would leave Second Earth with that monster, no matter how badly he felt about his parents."

"I know," I said softly.

"We've got to find him," Courtney concluded soberly.

The jumble of sweet musical notes that always accompanied a trip through the flume grew louder and more frequent. We were nearing our destination—Third Earth. It was where we would start our investigation. Patrick, the Traveler there, would be able to research the incredible computer databases of Earth in the year 5010 to trace how the Dimond Alpha Digital Organization came to be, and what may have happened to Mark. We were about to step into the future to try and piece together the past. But when we hit Third Earth . . .

Third Earth hit back.

No sooner had my feet touched ground when I got slammed and knocked backward. The next few seconds tumbled together wildly. At first I had no idea what was hap-

pening. That is until I felt the hot breath on my face and a searing pain tear through my left forearm. I was being attacked. It only took a few seconds to realize why. It was a quig-dog. The yellow-eyed beastie was on my chest. Its razor teeth gnashed to get at my neck, while its slobber dripped into my eyes.

"Kick it! Kick it!" I shouted, hoping that Courtney wasn't dealing with her own quig.

The beast was strong and had the benefit of surprise. I saw from the corner of my eye that it had slashed open my arm. I wasn't strong enough to stop it. In seconds its teeth would tear into my neck.

Fummm! I heard a familiar, sharp sound. The quig yelped and lurched away. I quickly jumped to my feet, braced for another attack. It didn't come. The vicious devil lay unconscious at the mouth of the flume. I quickly looked around to see Courtney holding a small silver cylinder about the size of a roll of quarters. She held it up like a weapon because, well, it was a weapon. When she had gone to the Sherwood house to meet Mark, she'd brought two canisters of pepper spray with her in case she ran into any quigs. After her roundtrip through the flume, they had transformed into silver canisters that shot out an energy burst like the weapons of Quillan. It was another example of how Second Earth technology had been changed.

"Nice shot," I gasped.

Her eyes were wide. "Was that bad?" she asked with a shaky voice. "Should I have left these stun guns back on Second Earth?"

"Bad?" I exclaimed, gulping air. "If you had, I wouldn't have a neck right now."

"Right," she gasped. "Did I kill it?"

"I wish," I said, nudging it with my toe. The monster didn't budge. "This is good news."

"How's that?" she asked, incredulous.

"If there are quigs here, it means Saint Dane is here. We're in the right place. This territory is hot."

"Should I be happy or scared?"

"Both," I answered.

Courtney looked at my arm and winced. She gently took my hand to get a closer look at the wound. There was a four-inch gash that ran across the top of my forearm. It wasn't deep, but it was bleeding. It hurt, too.

"I'll tie my T-shirt around it until Patrick can get me to a doctor," I said.

Courtney helped me pull off my T-shirt, which wasn't easy since I couldn't use my left arm. She ripped off a strip and tied it around my wound. Satisfied that the bleeding was stopped, she looked at me with a sly smile. "Dude, working out much?"

I was suddenly embarrassed that I didn't have a shirt on.

"Hey," I said, trying to sound flip. "You go through training like Loor put me through and you'd look like this too."

"Uhh, not exactly," Courtney said with a playful wink.

I was feeling all sorts of awkward so I ducked the subject. "Let's get changed."

The first task when arriving on a territory was to change into the proper clothing. There was a pile of clothes at the side of the flume, waiting for us. One of the great things about Third Earth was that the clothes weren't much different from Second Earth. Except for the shoes. I picked out a pair of straight, dark green pants and a white, long-sleeved T-shirt that could have come right from Old Navy. Courtney chose a white pair of pants and a navy blue shirt. We turned our backs for modesty and got changed.

I kept on my boxers, as usual.

My clothes fit perfectly. Courtney's didn't. The shirt was a size too big and the pants were too short. I have no idea why the clothes at the flumes always fit me. Maybe because I am a Traveler. I'm not sure what difference that should make, but I can't think of any other explanation.

"I look like a dweeb," Courtney announced with a frown.

She did, but I wasn't going to agree with her. No way. "You look great!" I meant it too. It didn't matter that her clothes looked like they belonged to somebody else, Courtney was stunning. A stunning dweeb.

The shoes looked like big doughnuts. I picked out a black pair and stuck them on my feet. Instantly they formed themselves around each foot into a perfect, comfortable, sneakerlike fit. Courtney did the same with a white pair.

"Okay, freaky," she said, though she wasn't complaining, because unlike her clothes, her shoes fit.

I went back to the pile of clothes, dug through and quickly found what I was looking for. It was a small, silver panel about the size of a baseball card.

"It's a communicator," I explained to Courtney. "It's how Gunny alerted Patrick the first time I came here."

The one Gunny used had a button on it. This didn't. It looked much sleeker, with a silver touch pad. I wondered if it was another example of how things had changed on the Earth territories. Either way, I hoped it did what it was supposed to. I touched the button. It gave off a quick hum.

"Is that it?" Courtney asked.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully. "I hope so. Let's get out of here."

The route was familiar to me. I led Courtney to the far wall and a wooden door that might have been three thousand years old. I knew this ancient piece of woodwork gave no hint to the

modern wonders that lay beyond. I pulled the door open and bright light filled the cavern. With a quick "after you" gesture to Courtney, we stepped outside into the gleaming white subway tunnel of Third Earth. The door closed behind us with a soft click. The only sign that it was there was the star symbol that marked it as a gate to the flume. The subway tunnel was exactly as I remembered it. It was incredibly clean, with shiny white tile walls and two silver monorail tracks about ten feet apart. So far, nothing was different about Third Earth except for the slight change in the communicator. And the quig that nearly ate my Adam's apple.

"This way, before a train comes," I said, and jogged toward the subway station. "This is the exact same station that was abandoned on Second Earth. But with a few changes."

"I remember what you wrote," Courtney assured me.

We quickly found ourselves at the modern subway station of Third Earth. Courtney climbed up to the platform first and then helped me because of my injured arm. It was all pretty much the same as I remembered it. The station was busy with people, but not crowded. We were able to sneak onto the platform without drawing attention. Courtney immediately ran across the platform. I knew exactly what she wanted to see.

On the far side, opposite the tracks, was a railing. Below that railing was a vast, multitiered underground mall that stretched fifty stories beneath us. Some levels were full of shops and offices. Other levels had apartments. All were busy with people, either hurrying about or riding two-wheeled vehicles that sped them silently on their way. Far down below was an indoor lake where people paddled boats and swam. It was a city built entirely underground. This is what Earth had become. Overcrowding and overpopulation had forced cities

to expand underground. It was actually a good thing. The surface of the planet was allowed to heal. Pollution was a thing of the past. People learned to respect our natural resources, while utilizing the planet as best they could.

Courtney looked down at this impossible city of the future. I watched her silently as she saw the words in my journal come to life.

"It's just awesome," she gasped.

I scanned the station, trying to collect my thoughts. It looked as if everything had progressed the way it was supposed to. Things didn't look any different from when I had been there before. It was a total relief. . . .

Until something odd caught my eye. It wasn't obvious at first, but after taking it all in for a few minutes, I noticed something that at first seemed impossible. I looked more closely, thinking I had to be wrong. What I saw made no sense. Besides the various passengers in the station, there were dozens of people who worked there. A guy sold newspapers. Another guy sold snacks. There was a subway conductor waiting for the next train and a transit cop walking his beat. A quick look down to the first few levels of the mall below showed me people working in stores, cleaning floors, and polishing shiny railings. There were mail carriers, ticket takers, window cleaners, and a hundred other people doing the various jobs it took to run a subway station and all the retail stores of the elaborate complex.

"What's the matter?" Courtney asked, sensing my tension.

"Look at the workers."

Courtney scanned the subway platform. At first it didn't click for her. Then I saw her react. She gave me a quick, nervous glance, and frowned.

"Am I crazy?" I asked.

"If you are, I am too," she answered. "Everybody looks exactly alike. I mean *exactly*! Was it like that when you were here before?"

"No, which means I know how it can be. You do too."

Courtney nodded and said the word I didn't want to say myself. "Dados."

"Yeah," I replied. "Third Earth has dados now. Lots of 'em."

"Which means the future isn't what it used to be," Courtney said softly.

"Let's find Patrick." I gently took Courtney's arm and led her to the up escalator. We needed to see the rest of Third Earth.

The *new* Third Earth.