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Opening extract from

Pendragon The Lost City of Farr

Written by

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This is for my mum,
Ellie

CLORAL

Hi, guys. I gotta apologise for taking so long to write. So much has happened since I left you two, Mark and Courtney. I'm not really sure where to begin. First off, one mystery is solved. Remember the giant shark that nearly ate me down in that mine shaft on Denduron? Well, now I know where it came from. The territory I'm on is called Cloral and it's entirely underwater. No kidding. Underwater. The quigs on Cloral are giant, flesh-eating sharks. Nice, huh?

Now let me tell you about some of the new trouble I've been getting into.

I was almost eaten, again; I came dangerously close to drowning; my arms were nearly yanked out of their sockets; and I think I cracked a couple of ribs – all in the first hour after I got here. Sounds like a fun place, no?

I'm writing this journal now because things have finally calmed down and I need the rest. I think it's best to start my story at the point when I last saw you two. Man, that already seems like years ago. Time sure flies when you're out of your mind.

I still have tons of questions about what's happened to my

life, but two jump to the top of the list. Why is it that I, Bobby Pendragon, have been chosen to become a Traveller? I don't think that's a lot to ask since I've had to risk my butt about a thousand times over while performing my Traveller duties. The second is that I want to know what happened to my family. I keep asking Uncle Press these questions, but getting info out of him is like squeezing blood from a turnip. (Not that I've ever tried squeezing a turnip, but it seems like a tough thing to do.) He keeps saying, "It will all come clear with time." Great. Meanwhile, we keep jumping from one disaster to the next, and the best I can hope for is that I'll stay alive long enough to figure out why the heck I'm in the middle of all this when all I really want to do is go home and hide under my bed with the dog. C'mon! I'm only fourteen! Is that too much to ask?

I guess it is, seeing as my home isn't there any more. The last time I saw you two, you were standing in front of the empty lot where my house used to be. It's hard to describe the emotions that were banging around inside me back then. I was nervous about going on another adventure with Uncle Press and bummed to be leaving you two guys, again. But the worst part was the fear of the unknown.

Uncle Press promised me I would see my family again. Mum, Dad, Shannon, and even my golden retriever, Marley. But he stopped short of telling me where they had gone. He told me that they had raised me and prepared me for the moment when I would leave home to become a Traveller, but he didn't tell me why. Was it planned from the moment I was born? Was my family part of some secret plot? He also told me that he wasn't my real uncle. Meaning, a blood relative. But he hadn't yet answered the single most important question: *Why?* Why are there Travellers who blast through time and space, helping the territories through dangerous times?

Who chooses them? Most importantly, why me?

To be honest, I've stopped asking these questions because his answers are always so freaking elliptical. It's like he's some kind of Jedi master who only drips out information on a need-to-know basis. Well, I need to know badly. But I guess I'll have to be patient and learn as I go along. I think Uncle Press is afraid if he lays it all out for me in one shot, the truth will make my head explode and I'll end up lying in a corner somewhere, drooling. He's probably right.

When I said goodbye to you two, I got into the car with Uncle Press and Loor, my partner from the adventure on Denduron. I was leaving my two best friends to take off with my new friend and partner. At least I considered Loor a friend. We had been through hell together on Denduron and even though I wasn't the warrior she was, I think I had earned her respect. At least I'd hoped I had.

I squeezed into the back compartment behind the two seats of the Porsche without being asked. Obviously Uncle Press was going to drive, and since Loor was bigger than me, there was no way she could fit in the back. She may have been dressed like she belonged on Second Earth, but she looked like no classmate I'd ever seen. I'm guessing she was around sixteen, but with her zero-body-fat, muscular bod, she looked ready for the Olympic decathlon. Her cocoa-dark skin made her look as if she were African, but I knew the truth. She was a warrior from the territory of Zadaa, which exists in an entirely different time and place from here. I think one of the first requirements for the Olympics is that you have to be from Earth. She didn't qualify.

"Comfy?" asked Uncle Press.

"Not even close," I answered.

With a laugh, Uncle Press hit the accelerator and once

again we screamed away from my home town of Stony Brook, Connecticut. I didn't even ask him where we were heading, because I knew. We were going back to the abandoned subway station in the Bronx to find the gate that led to the flume that would take us . . . somewhere.

The last time we travelled this route I was on the back of Press's motorcycle, with no clue of what lay ahead. This time I had a clue, but not much more.

We blasted along the turnpike, out of Connecticut, heading for New York City. Within half an hour we had gone from the leafy-green suburbs of Stony Brook, to the concrete pavement of the borough of New York called the Bronx. It's the home of Yankee Stadium, the Bronx Zoo, the New York Botanical Garden, and a secret Traveller flume into the unknown.

As Uncle Press manoeuvred the quick little sports car through the city streets, people turned to stare. This was a rough neighbourhood. They weren't used to seeing a sleek sports car screaming through their 'hood. Or maybe they were staring in wonder at the guy riding in the back who was turning blue because his knees were jammed into his throat. That would be me.

With a final spin of the wheel, Uncle Press brought us right up to the kerb next to the small green kiosk that was our destination. As I looked at that little building and the peeled paint on the sign above it that said SUBWAY, only one thought came to mind.

Here we go again.

I hadn't expected to see this place again so soon. No, I had expected to *never* see this place again. Uncle Press and I had come through this way only a few hours before, having returned from Denduron. My plan was to get back home, and

do my level best to forget about this whole Traveller business. But things changed. I discovered that my family was gone, along with the life I knew. I think Uncle Press brought me back to Stony Brook to see for myself. It was a smart move, because if he hadn't, I never would have believed it. I would always be thinking about how to get home. But there was no home to get back to any more. The cold, hard reality hit me that my destiny was to go with Uncle Press and learn more about being a Traveller. What a difference a few hours can make.

So there we were again, back in the Bronx, on the verge of starting my new life. I wanted to cry. Yes, I admit it. I wanted to cry. If Loor wasn't there, I probably would have.

Uncle Press hopped out of the car first, leaving the keys in the ignition. Loor and I crawled out after him. Actually, I did most of the crawling. I was so mashed up in the backseat that my legs were now totally asleep, and when I tried to stand, I fell over. Loor caught me and held me up until I got the feeling back. How embarrassing is that?

Uncle Press didn't stop to see if I was okay. He headed right for the stairs that led down into the subway.

"Uh, Uncle Press?" I called. "You sure you want to leave the car here?" I remembered back to our first trip here. We had left the motorcycle and the helmets right where the Porsche was now. I thought for sure that somebody would pinch them, but when we returned that morning, the bike was right where we had left it. The helmets were there too. Unbelievable. Pure luck. But this was really pushing it. A hot sports car sitting alone with the keys in the ignition was too tempting a prize. Worse, it was in a no-parking zone. If thieves didn't get the car, the cops would tow it for sure.

Uncle Press said, "It's okay. The acolytes will take care of it."

Huh? Acolytes? That was a new wrinkle. I looked at Loor to see if she knew what he was talking about. She shrugged. Before I could ask any more, Uncle Press disappeared down into the subway.

I said to Loor, "Yeah, I know – we'll learn more as we go along."

"Don't ask so many questions, Pendragon," she said. "Save them for when it is truly important." She then followed Uncle Press.

Truly important? Wasn't all this bizarro stuff truly important? I wanted to know! But since I was now standing alone and feeling dumb out here all by myself, the only thing I could do was follow. I was getting good at that.

I hurried down the dirty stairs and squeezed through the opening in the wooden boards that were nailed across the entrance. To the rest of the world this was a closed and abandoned subway station that had outlived its usefulness. To us Travellers, it was the crossroads of Second Earth, my home territory, and our jumping-off point to all the other distant territories. Sounds romantic, doesn't it? Well, it isn't. It's scary.

The filthy subway station was all too familiar to me. Subway trains still flew by, but it had been a long time since any had stopped at this forlorn spot. When I hit the platform, I saw something that brought back a chilling memory. It was the pillar that Uncle Press had hidden behind during his gun battle with Saint Dane. It was a battle that had given me the time to escape and find the gate and the flume that sent me to Denduron.

Saint Dane. There's a guy I'd like to forget. Uncle Press says he's a Traveller, like us. But he isn't exactly like us because the guy is wicked. On Denduron he pushed two rival tribes to the

brink of annihilation. But we stepped in and messed things up for him.

Unfortunately Denduron was only the beginning. Saint Dane promised to wreak havoc with all the territories in his quest to rule Halla. That's key. He wants to rule Halla. Now, I'm no genius, but since Uncle Press described Halla as "every territory, every person, every living thing, every *time* there ever was", then having a guy like Saint Dane be the ruler is not a very good idea.

What made it all so incredibly creepy was that Saint Dane enjoyed seeing people suffer. I saw that firsthand, too many times. This abandoned subway platform was the first. This was where he hypnotised a homeless guy into jumping to a gruesome death in front of a speeding subway train. It was a cold-blooded trick that Saint Dane said was "to give the boy a taste of what was in store for him".

The boy he referred to was me. Nice guy, huh? I told you before that the worst part about my new life as a Traveller was the fear of the unknown. Well, that's not entirely true. Right up there on my list of fears is knowing that somewhere, sometime, we will cross paths with Saint Dane again. The guy is worse than dangerous, and it is our job to stop him. Standing there on that platform, I was really wanting a different job.

"Pendragon!" called Loor.

I followed her voice to the end of the platform. I knew this route. We had to climb down on to the subway tracks, carefully avoid getting fried by the third rail, and make our way along the grimy, oil-stained wall until we came upon a wooden door. On this door would be a symbol that looked like a carved star identifying it as a gate. That was our destination.

With Uncle Press in the lead, we moved quickly along the

tracks. We had to hurry because a subway train could come charging along at any moment. There wasn't much room between the tracks and the wall and a train speeding past our noses would be hurt.

As we got closer to the door, I noticed that the ring on my finger began to grow warm. I looked at it and saw that the slate grey stone was beginning to transform. The dark grey colour began to melt away and the stone now sparkled. This was the sign that we were getting near a gate. It was amazing how many things I was taking for granted. Once upon a time, the idea of following a possessed, glowing ring to a mysterious door in an abandoned subway station would seem like an off-the-wall dream. Not any more. Now it felt natural. Sort of.

Uncle Press found the door, opened it, and hurried us all inside.

The cave inside hadn't changed. I immediately glanced into the dark tunnel that led off into the unknown. This was the flume that would sparkle to life and take us . . . somewhere. Right now it was quiet, waiting for us to tell it where we were going. I'd only travelled through the flume between Second Earth and Denduron. I had to believe that this time we were going somewhere else, and now was the time for Uncle Press to tell us where. Loor and I stood together, waiting for him to show us the way.

"We're going to split up," he said.

Whoa. Not a good start. Was he crazy? We shouldn't be broken apart! Uncle Press knew his way around the cosmos and Loor was a fierce warrior. The idea of fluming off to face Saint Dane by myself without any back-up was not something I could get psyched up about. A million thoughts and possibilities flashed through my brain – all of them bad. But just as

I was about to break into full panic mode, Loor spoke.

"Why?" she asked flatly.

Nothing like keeping it simple. She was good to have around.

"Since your mother died, you are the Traveller from Zadaa," he answered. "They'll need you there soon. I want you to go home and be ready."

"What about me?" I asked, immediately flying into protest mode.

"You and I are going to Cloral," was his answer. "Saint Dane went there for a reason and I want to know what it is."

Good news, bad news. Good news was Uncle Press and I were staying together. Bad news was we were going after Saint Dane. Really bad news.

"But if I'm the Traveller from Second Earth, shouldn't I stay here?" I asked hopefully. "You know, to take care of stuff?"

Uncle Press gave me a smile. He knew I was trying to weasel out.

"No, it's best you come with me," was his simple answer.

Oh well. I wasn't surprised that my lame attempt at getting out of this trip had failed miserably. But hey, it was worth a shot, right?

Loor then stepped up to me and said, "If you need me, I will be there for you, Pendragon."

Wow, that blew me away. I guess I had earned her respect after all. I nodded and said, "I'll be there for you, too."

We held eye contact for a moment. The bond the two of us had created during the war on Denduron was stronger than I had realised. I felt safer with her around, but it was more than that. I liked Loor. In spite of her inability to give an inch on anything, Loor's heart was always in the right place. I didn't

want to go on without her. And I really believe that if she'd had the choice, she'd have stayed with me. But before I could say another word, she turned and strode into the mouth of the flume. She stared into the dark abyss, took a deep breath, and called out, *"Zadaa!"*

Instantly the tunnel started to breathe. The rocky walls began to writhe like a giant snake slowly coming to life. Then there was the familiar sound – the jumble of sweet musical notes that came from somewhere deep in the tunnel and grew louder as they rushed toward us. The walls transformed from grey stone into brilliant crystalline gems, just as my ring had as we approached the gate. The light that shone from the tunnel was so bright that I needed to shield my eyes. Loor became nothing more than a dark silhouette standing before the brilliant display. She gave one last look back to us and waved good-bye. Then, in a flash of light, she was swept into the tunnel. The retreating light and music carried her away and back to her home, the territory of Zadaa.

In an instant the show was over and the tunnel returned to darkness.

"Your turn," said Uncle Press.

"Tell me about Cloral," I asked, stalling for time. As much as I knew a trip through the flume was kind of fun, I was nervous about what I'd find on the other end. I needed a few seconds to get my act together.

"You'll find out all you need to know once you get there," he answered as he nudged me closer to the mouth of the flume. "Don't worry, I'll be right behind you."

"Why don't you ever give me a straight answer?" I asked.

"I thought you liked surprises," he answered with a laugh.

"Not any more I don't!" I shouted back. Uncle Press used to surprise me all the time with great birthday gifts and

helicopter rides and camping trips and – basically all the coolio things a kid could ever want from an amazing uncle. But lately Uncle Press's surprises weren't as fun as they used to be. Especially since they mostly involved me being chased by hungry beasts or shot at or blown up or buried alive or . . . you get the idea.

"C'mon, you're no fun any more," he teased as he pushed me into the flume. "*Cloral!*" he shouted, and stepped out as the tunnel sprang back to life. I didn't even look into the depths because I knew what was coming.

"Fun?" I shouted. "If you think this is fun, you're crazy!"

"Oh, one thing, Bobby," he said.

"What?"

"Remember the Cannonball."

"What 'cannonball'?" I asked. "What's that supposed to mean?"

The light grew brighter and the musical notes grew louder. I was seconds away from launch.

"Just before you drop into Cloral, hold your breath."

"What!"

The last thing I saw was Uncle Press laughing. Then the light grabbed me and sucked me into the tunnel. I was on my way.

◐ SECOND EARTH ◐

"What are you two doing in here?" shouted Mr Dorrico, the chief caretaker of Stony Brook Junior High. "This ain't a library. You can't sit here reading your – hey, you're a girl! Girls aren't allowed in the boys' bathroom!"

Mr Dorrico had been a caretaker at Stony Brook for most of his illustrious fifty-year caretaking career. There wasn't much you could put past him and this time was no different. There was indeed a girl in the boys' lavatory. Mr Dorrico may have been ancient and terminally cranky, but he could still tell girls from boys. Most of the time.

Courtney Chetwynde and Mark Dimond had been sitting on the floor, reading Bobby's first journal from Cloral. The bathroom on the third floor was near the art department. It was rarely used by anyone, boy or girl. It had become Mark's fortress of solitude. When the world got too busy, Mark would come here to escape and think and eat carrots and be alone. If he received one of Bobby's journals at school, this is the place he would come to read it. And since Courtney was now part of the picture, she would join him. The fact that she was a girl never seemed to

matter, considering how important the journals were. But now they were faced with an angry chief caretaker who looked as if he were going to have a heart attack at the very thought of a girl being in the boys' bathroom.

Mark jumped to his feet and quickly grabbed up the pages of Bobby's journal. "It's c-cool. W-We were just leaving," he stammered nervously.

Whenever he got stressed, Mark stuttered. Courtney, on the other hand, was at her best under pressure. She stood slowly, walked up to Mr Dorrico, and stared him right in the eye.

"The only reason I came in here," she said confidently, "was because there were so many boys in the girls' bathroom. It was getting way too crowded in there . . . and they never lift the toilet seats."

"What!" shouted Mr Dorrico, his face turning three shades of red.

To him this was clearly an offence that threatened to crack the very foundation of etiquette that our society was founded on. He grabbed the mop that he was going to use to swab up the boys' bathroom and charged back out, ready to do battle with the rogue delinquents who mocked the sanctity of the girls' lavatory.

Mark stepped up to Courtney and said, "You are bad."

"Time to go," she replied with a mischievous smile.

They ran from the bathroom and down the hall, careful to avoid the girls' room.

Mark knew that he and Courtney Chetwynde made an odd pair. Mark was an introvert. He lived in a world of books and graphic novels. He didn't have many friends. His hair was always a little too long and a little too unwashed. Sports were a four-letter word to him and his mother still picked out his clothes, which meant he wore a lot of non-name-brand geek outfits that were always about two years out of date. But the thing was, he

didn't care. Mark never wanted to be cool. In fact, being comfortable with his noncoolness made Mark feel pretty good about himself. Where everyone else was busy trying to impress their friends with the way they looked or who they hung out with or what parties they went to, Mark couldn't be bothered. So Mark considered himself cooler than cool – in a nerdy kind of way.

Courtney, on the other hand, had it all going on. She was tall and beautiful, with long brown hair that fell to her waist and piercing grey eyes. She got decent grades. Not world-class, but good enough. She also had a ton of friends. But the thing that defined Courtney was sport. Volleyball in particular. Courtney was so tall and strong that it was unfair for her to play against most girls, so she played on the guys' teams at Stony Brook. As it turned out, it was unfair for her to play against most boys, too. She absolutely crushed them. Guys feared her because they didn't want to be embarrassed by a girl, but more because they were afraid when they faced Courtney, they'd lose teeth. At fourteen she was already a legend.

So the differences between Mark Dimond and Courtney Chetwynde were so huge that a friendship wasn't something you'd expect. That is, except for one thing.

Bobby Pendragon.

Both Mark and Courtney had known Bobby since they were little. Mark and Bobby were best buds beginning in kindergarten. Bobby spent so much time at Mark's house that Mrs Dimond referred to him as her second son. As they grew older their interests changed. Bobby was into sport and was incredibly outgoing. Mark . . . wasn't. But where most people who were so different would drift apart, Mark and Bobby had a friendship that didn't fade. Bobby often said that as different as they seemed, they both laughed at the same things, and that meant they really weren't so different after all.

As for Courtney, Bobby met her in the fourth grade and fell in love. From the very first second he saw her stunning grey eyes, Bobby got slammed with a crush that had yet to fade. Growing up, they were rivals in sports. Bobby was one of the few guys who wasn't intimidated by Courtney. Just the opposite. Even though she was a girl, he never cut her any slack. Why should he? She was too good. When they played dodge ball, he'd go after her as hard as she went after him. When they ran the four hundred in gym, he'd make sure the two of them went head-to-head. Sometimes he won; other times Courtney took him. In Little League they were on opposing teams and both were pitchers. When the other came up to bat, they'd each dig down a little deeper to throw heat. Naturally there was the occasional brush-back pitch that sent the other into the dirt. No one ever got hit, though. They may have been rivals, but they were still friends.

The thing was, as strong as Bobby's crush on Courtney was, Courtney felt just as strongly about Bobby. But neither let the other one know until that fateful night when Courtney came to Bobby's house before a basketball game. That's when Courtney admitted to Bobby how great she thought he was. It was also the night the two kissed for the first time. For Bobby, it was one of those incredible moments that actually transcended expectations. It was downright magical.

Unfortunately it was also the night when Bobby's Uncle Press took him away from home to begin their adventure on the troubled territory of Denduron. Bobby's old life ended with that one sweet Courtney kiss.

It was out of concern for Bobby Pendragon that Mark and Courtney got together. Both were terrified that something horrible would happen to him as he flumed through the territories. It was Mark who first started receiving Bobby's journals through the magical ring that was given to him one strange night. It was

presented by a kind, strong woman who Mark thought was part of a dream. But in the morning the dream was over, and the ring was still there. This woman turned out to be Osa, Loor's mother, who was doomed to die while protecting Bobby. This ring was the conduit through which Bobby could send the journals of his incredible adventure back to his friends.

Reading about Bobby's adventures was both exciting and frightening for Mark. The perils were more enthralling than any action flick he'd ever seen. But Bobby's stories weren't meant to be entertaining. They were real, and that's why they were so frightening. The idea that there was a group of people called Travellers who voyaged through the universe doing battle against evil was a concept that challenged everything Mark knew about how things worked. Stranger still, knowing that his best friend was one of these Travellers made it all the more tough to deal with.

The fact was he couldn't deal with it. Not alone, anyway. That's why he brought Courtney into his confidence. Together, the two would read Bobby's journals and try to help each other understand what was happening to their friend.

Their meeting place of choice was the basement of Courtney's house. Her dad had a workshop down there, but he never used it. Courtney always laughed at her father, saying how he got all these tools because they looked cool, but then had no idea of what to do with them. So the basement workshop was pretty much a dusty tool-museum, which was perfect for Mark and Courtney. There was a big worn-out couch down there where they would settle in to devour Bobby's journals.

Their run-in with Mr Dorrico came towards the end of the school day, so the two didn't go back to class. Instead, they headed right to Courtney's house. Courtney even skipped volleyball practice. She never missed practice unless there was

an emergency. The arrival of a journal from Bobby definitely qualified.

Courtney ran down the basement steps ahead of Mark and leaped into the old couch sending up a cloud of dust. "C'mon!" she shouted impatiently at Mark. "I'm dying! I want to know what happened on Cloral!"

Mark had Bobby's journal in his backpack. But rather than dig it out and sit next to Courtney so they could continue reading, he stood over her, looking nervous.

"What's the matter?" she asked, trying to sound as impatient as she felt.

"C-Courtney, I-I'm scared," he said softly.

Normally Courtney would bulldoze over guys like Mark if she wasn't getting what she wanted. But this was different. They were a team. They shared a secret. If one of them was having a problem, the other one had to respect that. So as eager as she was to rip the pack off of Mark's back and grab Bobby's journal, she took a breath and tried to relax.

"I am too," she said softly. "But I want to know if he's okay."

"I'm not talking about Bobby," Mark whined. "I'm scared for us."

Courtney sat back in surprise. Mark now had her full attention.

"Why?"

Mark paced. "Ever since he left a few months ago, I've been giving this a lot of thought."

"Yeah, no kidding. Me too," Courtney said. But obviously Mark's thoughts were more troubling than Courtney's because he was the only one worried just then.

"Think about what's at stake here," Mark continued. "Saint Dane is trying to rule Halla. That's everything. Every time and every place there ever was. Don't you think that's a little scary?"

"Well, yeah," she answered. "Until a few months ago the biggest thing I had to worry about was passing algebra. Going from that to sweating over the future of all space and time is kind of a leap for me."

Mark nodded. A problem this huge was kind of hard to get your mind around.

"Okay," he said while continuing to pace. "It's hard for me to understand too, but there's more. Uncle Press told Bobby that all the territories were about to reach a turning point. It was the job of the Travellers to help them get through the crises so they could continue to exist in peace. If they failed, the territory would fall into chaos, and that's when Saint Dane would step in."

"Okay, so?" Courtney said impatiently. She wanted to know where this was going.

"So think about it," Mark said, getting worked up. "Bobby and Press went to Denduron because that territory was on the verge of a civil war. We just read that Press told Loor she had to go back to her home territory of Zadaa because they would need her there soon."

Courtney listened carefully. Mark was leading to a point and she wanted to make sure she fully understood what it was.

"Saint Dane went to Cloral," he continued. "Bobby and Press followed him there. Cloral must be reaching its critical time too."

"I get all this. But why are you so scared?" Courtney asked.

"Think," he said quickly. "We're reading these journals like they're stories happening far away from our safe little town. Sure, Bobby is right in the middle of things, but nothing is touching us. Not here. Not in the safe suburbs."

Courtney was starting to catch on. "You're saying something big might happen here, too?" asked Courtney soberly.

"Exactly!" shouted Mark. "We're a territory too. Second Earth. We're not immune. We're part of Halla or whatever it's called."

Courtney turned away from Mark to let this sink in. If all the territories were about to reach a turning point, that had to include their own territory as well. This was definitely bad news.

"I'll tell you something else," Mark said. "We've been trying to figure out why Bobby is a Traveller. I have no idea why, but I'll bet I know *when*."

"Huh?" said Courtney. "When what?"

"It seems like Travellers only go where they are needed, *when* they're needed," reasoned Mark. "I'll bet the time has come for Second Earth to need a Traveller, and that's why we now have one. Bobby."

Courtney didn't ask another question. She didn't need to. What Mark said made all sorts of sense. Up until now, everything that Bobby had written was true. He wrote that Uncle Press warned him that all the territories were nearing a critical time. *All* the territories. That included this one. Second Earth. Home.

"You want to hear more?"

"Not really," answered Courtney nervously.

"I think we're part of it, you and I," he said. "Bobby is sending us his journals. Besides him, we're the only ones here who know what's going on."

"You think we're being prepared for a battle on Second Earth?" Courtney asked softly, as if she could hardly get the words out.

"I think that's exactly what's happening," answered Mark.

Suddenly Courtney was just as scared as Mark. He had finally made his point, but she wished he hadn't.

"So what do we do?"

Mark took off his pack and sat down next to her.

"That part I haven't figured out," he answered. He dug inside the pack and pulled out Bobby's journal. Unlike the first journal that was written on crude, yellowed parchment paper, these

pages were light green and supple. Each page was roughly the size of standard printer paper, but the edges weren't square. These pages were oddly shaped, as if they had been handmade. The green pages were like a light, thin rubber. The writing looked pretty much the same as the other journals though. The words were written in black ink, and the handwriting was definitely Bobby's.

"Until we get more of an idea of what to expect," continued Mark. "All we can do is read Bobby's journals and learn as much as we can so when the time comes . . . we're ready."

Courtney stared into Mark's eyes. His last comment sounded ominous. This wasn't a game happening to someone else. This was real. Common sense told them that sometime, somehow they were going to get sucked into this nightmare. Courtney was beginning to hate common sense. The question was, when would it happen? Those questions could only be answered by the words in Bobby's journal, so without any more conversation, Mark and Courtney looked down at the strange green pages and continued to read.