



An excerpt from Pendragon, Book Two:
The Lost City of Faar
By D.J. MacHale

Journal #5: Cloral

Hi, guys. I gotta apologize 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 Traveler? 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 Traveler 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 anymore. 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. Mom, 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 Traveler, 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 Travelers who blast through time and space, helping the territories through dangerous times? Who chooses them? Most important, 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 bad. 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 someplace, drooling. He's probably right.

When I said good-bye 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 gas and once again we screamed away from my hometown of Stony Brook, Connecticut. I didn't even ask him where we were headed, 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 traveled 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, headed 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 Traveler flume into the unknown.

As Uncle Press maneuvered the quick little sports car through the city streets, people turned to stare. This was a rough neighborhood. 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 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 curb 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 Traveler 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 anymore. The cold, hard reality hit me that my destiny was to go with Uncle Press and learn more about being a Traveler. 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 Travelers, 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 Traveler, 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 hypnotized a homeless guy into jumping to a gruesome

death in front of a speeding subway train. It was a coldblooded 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 Traveler 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 would cross paths with Saint Dane again. The guy was worse than dangerous, and it was 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 onto 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 gray stone was beginning to transform. The dark gray color 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 anymore. 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 traveled through the flume between Second Earth and Denduron. I had to believe that this time we were going someplace 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 backup 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 Traveler 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 Traveler 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 realized. 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 gray 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 anymore 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 anymore," 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.

Copyright © 2003 by D. J. MacHale

[Discuss this book at the Lost City of Faar message board forum!](#)