



An excerpt from Pendragon, Book Three:  
The Never War  
By D.J. MacHale

**Chapter 1: First Earth**

That's where I am. First Earth. Veelox was a misdirection. Spader and I flumed to Veelox, but found the action wasn't there. It was here on First Earth.

Where is First Earth? The better question is, *when* is First Earth? I'm in New York City and it's 1937. March of 1937 to be exact. To be *really* exact, it's March 11 of 1937. I'm writing this on my birthday. Here's a weird thought: If I'm in 1937 and it's my birthday, did I still turn fifteen? Kind of freaky, no?

I'll begin this new journal by telling you I stumbled into the most bizarro, confusing, dangerous situation yet. But then again, haven't I said that before? Let me give you a little taste of what happened in only the first few minutes since I got here....

Spader and I were nearly killed. Three times. We were also robbed and witnessed a gruesome murder. Happy birthday to me! The way things are going, I know what I want for my fifteenth birthday...the chance to have a sixteenth.

When Spader and I flumed in from Veelox, I had no idea of what "First Earth" meant. Since I'm from Second Earth, I could only guess that First Earth was sometime in the Earth's past. But how far past? For all I knew we were fluming back to a time when quigs were dinosaurs and we'd be on the run from hungry, yellow-eyed raptors.

I was totally relieved to find that when we landed at the gate, it was the exact same rocky room that I had been through many times before. Yes, we had arrived at the gate off the subway tunnel in the Bronx, New York. Phew. At least there were no T-rexes or Neanderthals waiting for us. That was the good news.

Bad news was that we weren't alone. As soon as the flume dropped us off, I saw two guys standing there, facing us. They wore old-fashioned gray suits, like Clark Kent wears in the old *Superman* show on TV Land. Actually, a better analogy is that these guys were dressed like the *bad guys* from that old show, because that's what they were. Bad guys. *Very* bad guys. They wore wide-brimmed hats that were pulled down low and had white handkerchiefs around their noses and mouths like banditos. There's only one word to describe these dudes.

Gangsters.

Their eyes looked wide and scared. No big surprise. They had just seen Spader and me drop out of nowhere in an explosion of light and music. They seemed totally stunned, which was good because there was one other detail I haven't mentioned....

They were both holding machine guns that were aimed at the flume -- and at us.

"Down!" I yelled at Spader.

The two of us jumped to opposite sides of the flume just as the gangsters started shooting. I crouched in a ball, totally unprotected as the deadly clatter from their rapid-fire guns echoed off the rocky walls. I thought for sure I'd get hit, but after a few seconds the shooting stopped, and I was still intact. I was afraid to move and even more afraid to look over and see if Spader was okay. The sharp explosions fell off to a distant echo that bounced around the cavelike room. My ears were ringing and the chemical smell of gunpowder burned my nose. I figured this was what it must be like to be in a war.

"Get up!" one of the gangsters ordered. "Hands in the air!"

I cautiously looked over to Spader and saw that he was okay. We stood slowly and raised our hands. The gangsters held their guns on us. I didn't know why. It wasn't like we had weapons of our own. The second gangster kept glancing nervously between the two of us. He looked almost as scared as we were. Almost.

"Th-They from Mars?" he asked his buddy nervously.

Under less terrifying circumstances, I would have laughed. It must have looked like we had just landed from outer space. Not only did we flash in through a storm of light, we were still dressed in our bright blue swimskins from Cloral. For a second I thought about pulling a huge bluff and chanting: "Drop your weapons or we will vaporize you with our mind-heat," or something equally sci-fi, but I didn't get the chance.

"Don't matter," barked the other gangster. He was definitely the one in charge, but I could tell from his voice that he was a little shaky too.

"We done our job," he added.

"S-So what about th-them?" the nervous gangster asked.

The guy in charge looked us over. I could almost hear the wheels turning in his brain. He didn't exactly seem like a rocket scientist, so they must have been very small wheels. I wondered if they hurt when they turned.

"You!" the guy barked at me. "Gimme that ring!"

I couldn't believe it. He wanted my Traveler ring! This was serious. You guys know how badly I need that ring. It shows me where the flumes are, and it's the only way I can get my journals to you. Without this ring, I'm lost.

"It's not worth anything," I said in a feeble attempt to talk him out of it.

"Don't matter," the gangster snapped back at me. "All I want is proof to show you two are real."

"Then take us with you, mates!" said Spader, trying to be friendly. "We're all the proof you need, in the flesh!"

"Those ain't my orders," he snarled.

"Really? What *are* your orders?" I asked.

"Just hand over the ring," the boss commanded. He raised his machine gun to prove he meant business. What could I do? I took off my ring and tossed it to him. He caught it and jammed it into his pocket.

"Let's step outside, nice and easy," the guy said.

This was good. It meant they weren't going to gun us down right that moment. Maybe there was a way out of this after all. The nervous gangster threw the wooden door open, then both stepped aside and motioned with their weapons for us to go through. I looked at Spader. Spader shrugged. We had to play along. With our hands up, we both stepped out of the gate and into the dark subway tunnel.

Everything was familiar, so I made a sharp right, knowing it was the way to the abandoned subway station.

But the gangster had other things in mind. "No, you don't," he ordered. "Keep walking."

We had to walk straight ahead, away from the door. Three steps later we stepped over the rail of the subway track. This was beginning to look bad again.

"Stop! Turn around."

Oh yeah, this was bad. We were both now standing on the train tracks.

"You move, you die," said the first gangster.

Yeah, right. We move, we die. If a train comes along, we *don't* move, we die. Not a lot of wiggle room here.

"Where are we, Pendragon?" whispered Spader.

His answer came in the form of a far off whistle. We both looked to our right and saw the headlight of a subway train rounding the bend, headed our way, on our track.

"What is that thing?" asked Spader nervously. Being from a territory that was covered entirely with water, he had never seen anything like a train before.

"That," I said, trying not to let my voice show the fear that was tearing at my gut, "is a pretty big tum-tigger."

"Hobey," said Spader in awe. "We just got here and we've already lost."

We had been on First Earth for all of two minutes, and we were staring death right in the eye.

Welcome home, Bobby Pendragon.

That's a taste of how our adventure on First Earth began. I don't want to get too far ahead because there was a whole lot that happened between the time I finished my last journal, and when we landed here. But I wanted to explain to you how I lost my ring. This is serious because as I write this journal to you, Mark and Courtney, I'm not really sure if you're ever going to read it. If I don't get that ring back, I'll never be able to send this to you. The only thing I can do is keep writing, hang on to the journals, and hope that I get the ring back soon.

Now, let me rewind to where I finished my last journal and get you guys back up to speed.

I spent my last few days on the territory of Cloral in a haze. We'd defeated Saint Dane, but I didn't feel much like celebrating. That's because Uncle Press was gone, and I kept replaying his last moments over and over in my head. Saint Dane had escaped through a flume and Spader tried to chase him. But a storm of bullets came back at him. Uncle Press realized what was happening, knocked Spader out of the way...and took the bullets himself.

He died in my arms. It was the absolute worst moment of my life. The only thing that kept me from totally losing it was that just before he died, he promised me we'd be together again. I know this sounds pretty loopy, but I believe him. If being a Traveler has taught me anything, it's that nothing is impossible. My eyes have been opened to so many new worlds and levels of existence that the idea of hooking up with Uncle Press again doesn't seem all that far-fetched.

Of course, I have no clue how it might happen. That's because I've only scratched the surface of knowing all there is to know about being a Traveler. I wish there were an instruction manual I could buy through Amazon.com that would spell out all the rules and regulations. Unfortunately, it's not that easy. I've got to learn things as I go along. And now I've got to do it without Uncle Press.

Welcome to my life as a Traveler, phase two.

In those last days on Cloral, I knew what my next move had to be, but I was putting it off because, well, I was scared. Things were different now. I was alone. It was a whole new ballgame and I wasn't sure if I was good enough to play in it.

When Saint Dane flumed out of Cloral, he was headed for a territory called Veelox. I knew I had to follow him, but the idea of going after him alone was about as appealing as setting my hair on fire. All things being equal, I think I'd rather have set my hair on fire. So I made a decision that I hope I don't regret.

I asked Vo Spader to go with me.

Don't get me wrong, Spader is a great guy. He's the Traveler from Cloral, after all. He saved my life more than once; he's an incredible athlete; he's about as brave as can be; and most importantly, he's my friend. So why should I be worried about asking him to come with me?

It's because his total, blind hatred of Saint Dane is dangerous. Saint Dane caused the death of his father and for that, Spader wants revenge. Big time. Hey, I don't blame him. But there were a few times on Cloral where Spader got so completely wrapped up in Saint Dane-hating that he nearly got us all killed. Truth be told, Spader's anger toward Saint Dane is one of the reasons Uncle Press is dead.

Since then, Spader promised me he would control himself, and his anger. I can only hope that when we come face-to-face with the demon again, and I guarantee we will, Spader won't do anything stupid. These were some of the conflicted thoughts that were banging around inside my head as I finished my last journal.

"Hobey-ho, Pendragon," Spader said as he strode into my apartment the morning of our departure.

Spader had almond-shaped eyes that looked sort of Asian. They turned up slightly and made him look as if he were always smiling. The truth was, most of the time he *was* smiling...when he wasn't obsessing over Saint Dane, that is. His long black hair was still wet, which meant he had been in the water. Spader spent a lot of time in the water, playing traffic cop with the boats and barges that came and went from Grallion. He loved his job, and his life there. At least he loved it before he found out he was a Traveler. Things had changed a little since then.

"It's time," I said.

"For what?" was his quick response.

"Cloral is safe. Uncle Press is gone. And I'm as ready as I'll ever be to go after Saint Dane."

Spader gave me a devilish smile. "Now you're talking, mate! I've been waiting to hear those words for weeks! What if the trail's gone cold?"

"I don't think that's possible," I answered. "Uncle Press always said that time between territories isn't relative."

Spader frowned. "You lost me."

I had to laugh. This didn't make a whole lot of sense to me either, but I had to trust Uncle Press.

"Look at it this way," I explained. "Saint Dane flumed to Veelox a few weeks ago, but since then he may have spent five years there. Or a minute."

"Now I'm totally lost," Spader said in frustration.

"Bottom line is, we're not too late," I said. "It doesn't matter when we go after him, because the flume will put us where we need to be, *when* we need to be there."

"O-kay," said Spader tentatively. "I'll trust you on that."

I'd already said good-bye to our friends on Grallion, and I'd sent my last journal to you. I had explained the importance of journals to Spader and he had already started his own. The person he chose to send them to on Cloral for safekeeping was Wu Yenza. She was the chief aquaneer and Spader's boss. He couldn't have picked a better person.

I took a last look around my apartment. Then we went down to the docks, loaded our air globes and water sleds onto a skimmer boat, and left Grallion for the flume. Spader was the expert, so he drove. As we shot across the water I looked back at the giant, floating farm habitat of Grallion, wondering if I'd ever see it again. I liked Cloral. There were times when I actually had fun on that territory. It gave me hope that being a Traveler didn't mean I always had to live in a state of fear and confusion.

Now the question was, what lay ahead of us? Pretty much a state of fear and confusion. Great. Here we go again.

The trip to the flume was cake. We anchored the skimmer near the reef, popped on the air globes that allowed us to breathe underwater, triggered the water sleds, and quickly sank below the surface. We didn't run into any shark quigs either. I think that once Saint Dane is finished with a territory, the quigs no longer patrol the gates. Still, I wasn't taking any chances. As we sped through the water being pulled by the sleds, I kept glancing back to make sure nothing nasty was sneaking up on us to try and get a nibble.

I didn't relax until we shot under the shelf of rock that led to the gate. Following the glow from my ring, we quickly found the wide circle of light that led up and into the cavern that held the flume. Moments later we were standing together in the cavern, staring up at the dark flume tunnel that was cut into the rock wall high over our heads.

This was it. The last few seconds of calm.

Spader looked at me and smiled. "My heart's thumpin'."

So was mine. We were standing at the starting line and the gun was about to go off. Spader loved adventure. Me? I'd just as soon be home watching toons. Knowing Spader was nervous made me feel like I wasn't such a weenie after all.

He added, "We're in for another natty-do, aren't we, mate?"

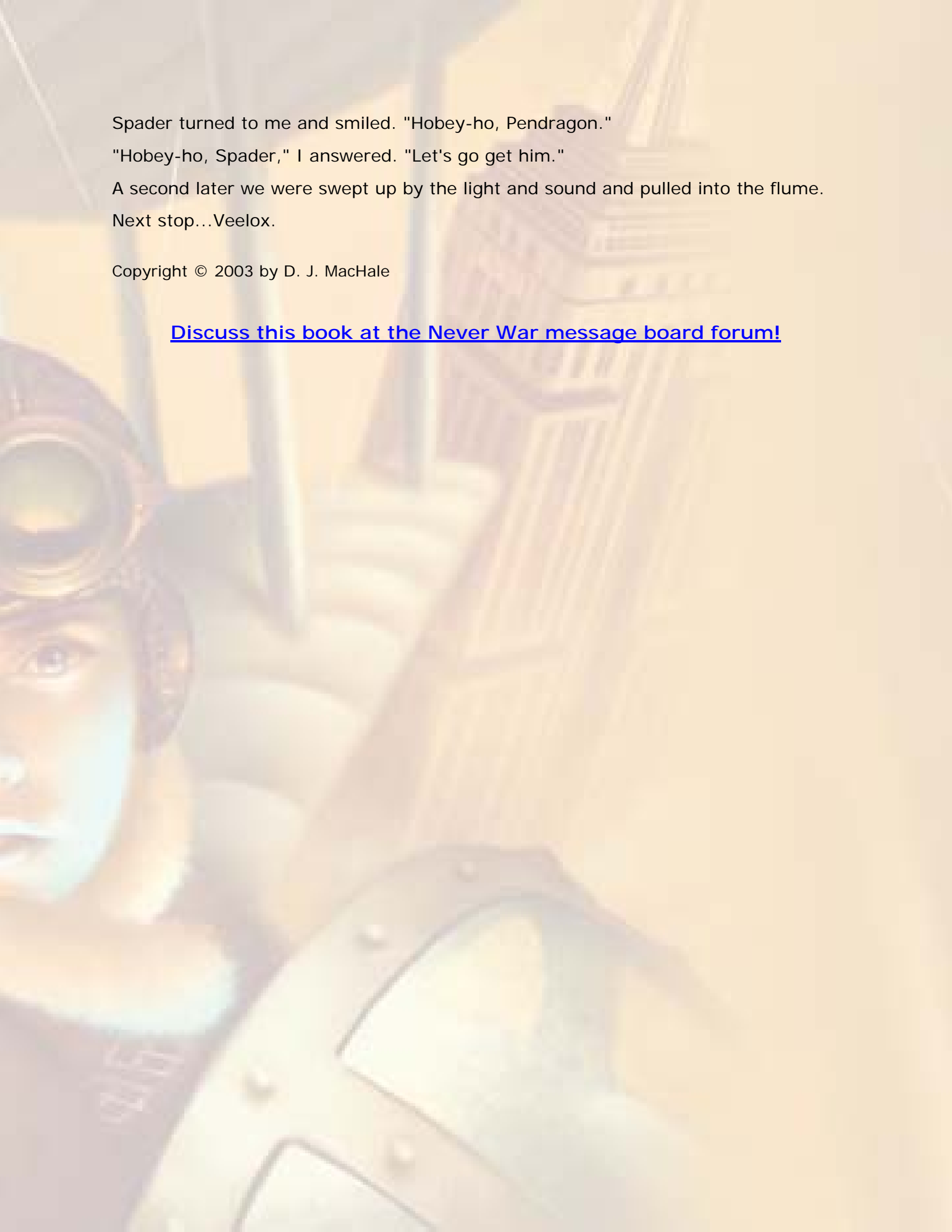
"Yeah," I answered. "Pretty much."

"No use in wasting time here then," he said, sounding a lot braver than I felt.

"Yeah," I said. "We're on the wrong territory."

I stood straight, looked up to the dark hole of the flume, and shouted, "*Veelox!*"

The tunnel sprang to life. Shafts of bright light shot from deep inside. The familiar jumble of musical notes could be heard faintly at first, but quickly grew louder. They were coming to get us.



Spader turned to me and smiled. "Hobey-ho, Pendragon."

"Hobey-ho, Spader," I answered. "Let's go get him."

A second later we were swept up by the light and sound and pulled into the flume.

Next stop...Veelox.

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