



CHAPTER 4: FIRST LANDING

"Where are we?"

"Darned if I know. Both the dang indicators broke."

"Probably the springs. They can be easily fixed."

"Well, let's take a look outside, shall we?"

The three men push open the door of the cylinder and step out. They are stepping into what is for them, in one sense, unfamiliar territory, but in another sense, a page out of history.

They have landed just behind a small clump of trees on a bare-looking plane. There are no houses in sight. All they can see in any direction are small hills, stream-filled gullies, and here and there a cactus.

"Well, where do you think we might be, Walt?"

"Beats me."

"Well, let's look around a bit," ventures Kerry.

"But," insists Daniel, "let's inspect the cylinder first, shall we?"

A cursory check reveals that, as they expected, a few of the outer layer tiles have been destroyed by the trip.

"Well, these will have to be replaced," observes Walt.

"It's a good thing," adds Daniel "that we came prepared for this."

Meanwhile, Kerry has been looking around. He suddenly notices something. "Say, fellows, there are some people up ahead there." He points past the group of trees in front of them. "Maybe they can give us an idea of where we are."

Several men in tattered clothes, some wearing strange looking hats, are gathered at one end of a small stream. Most of them seem to have their hands in the water. Moving past the trees, our friends notice that this is only one of many small groups which are spread out all along the stream and at various pools in the ground as well. As the first group notices our threesome approaching, several of the men begin to talk excitedly:

"Howdy, strangers! Welcome to Drygultch."

"Would you be th' ones what come in that thar strange contraption we seen come a-whizzin' through th' air an' plop down behind them trees over thar?"

"I knowed folks was a-usin' ever kinda means conceivable t' git here, but I swear I ain't never seen nor imagined one o' them things in all my born days."

"Whata y' call it?"

"How's it work?"

Walt raises his hand and speaks for the group. "Perhaps we can answer your questions better if you answer a few for us first."

"Whata y' wanna know?"

"Well, for starters, what year is this? And, secondly, where are we?"

A posture of puzzlement comes over the group. Two of its members speak, one right after the other:

"Are you guys crazy or something?"

"Wow! You must really be outa touch! But if y' didn't come here 'cause o' th' rush, why'd y' come?"

Meanwhile, Kerry and Daniel have been looking around for clues. Upon hearing the word 'rush,' Kerry's ears perk up. "Did you say 'th' rush?' Look at those pans, Walt. They must be panning for gold. This wouldn't be the great California gold rush of 1849, would it?"

One of the men jumps up and puts his hands on his hips. "So, you do know where you are?!"

"By conjecture only."

"This is making less and less sense all th' time. Who in th' heck are y' and where d' y' come from?"

"Why should we tell you?" asks Walt. "You wouldn't believe us anyway."

"Try us!"

"Yeah! You'd better tell us," insets one man, raising his fist, "or we'll flatten th' lot o' you here an' now!"

Will scratches his head. "Well don't say we didn't warn you that you wouldn't believe us."

"Just tell us, an' let us decide."

"Well," replies Walt, "We are from precisely one hundred and forty-seven years into your future."

"That 'contraption' as you call it," adds Kerry, pointing to the cylinder, now barely visible through the trees, "is a time tube."

"It has transported us," adds Daniel, "from what was your future and our present here into what is your present and our past."

"What kinda tomfoolery is that?" yells one man.

"You were right," says another. "We don't believe y'."

"That's th' most dogern ridiculous thing I ever did hear of," adds another.

The man who had raised his fist now asks the other men, "Whata y' say, boys? Shall we deck 'em?"

"Nah! Jist hold on, Fred. It wouldn't be worth it."

Now a small man, who had been quiet up till now, speaks. "And who knows? Perhaps they're tellin' th' truth."

"You mean t' say you believe 'em, Sam?"

"Well, it's possible, I guess. After all, we never thought we'd see a contraption like that come a-whizzin' through th' air, now did we?"

"Well, I reckon y' got a point there, Sam."

"I didn't see nothing' come through th' air!" insists another man.

"Well, that's 'cause you wasn't looking', Pete," replies the small man, "But it was sure there-bigger 'n' life."

One of the men turns incredulously to the three. "So, y' didn't come fer gold?"

"Nah!" replies Walt. "We've got all the money we want. But we would like to watch you panning, if you don't mind."

"Suit yerselves."

They watch as the men scoop their pans into the stream and bring them out again. When the pan comes up empty, there are cries of disappointment, but when they contain nuggets of gold, shouts of joy go up from the miners. This is truly a new sight for Walt, Daniel, and Kerry -- a page out of history indeed. They watch with interest as the men bring up pan after pan.

Finally, one of the men turns to the three visitors and says "Say! I'll bet you fellows would really enjoy th' shindig over t' th' saloon tonight."

"Saloon?" The three look around, wondering where there could be a saloon in this wilderness.

"At th' town, just over that thar hill," the man explains.

"And--Ah--what's a shindig?" asks Daniel.

"What's a shindig?" echoes another man, laughing.

"You'll find out." answers the first man, smiling from ear to ear. "Just be there."

Walt looks at the other two. "Whata y' say fellows?"

"Well, it may give us a chance to learn more about this culture before we move on."

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Having obtained the necessary directions for reaching the town and the saloon, as well as, due to Kerry's thoughtfulness, a hotel, the three return to the cylinder to work on the new coordinate settings and to try to establish radio contact with home base before getting ready to attend the shindig.

In a few minutes, Walt and Daniel have the new coordinates settings figured out. As they are finishing, Kerry turns on the communicator and begins to turn the dials. There is a loud whirring sound and then silence. Having finished the calculations, Daniel goes to the mike and begins talking. At first, there is nothing but static. Then, they hear a soft buzzing noise. Suddenly, the buzz becomes louder. At last, a voice is heard. It is a bit muffled, but clear enough to be recognized as that of John.

"This is KRXQ20 reading you loud and clear. Say, how're you fellows doing?"

"We're doing just fine, John," replies Daniel. "Reading you fairly clear--just a bit muffled."

"Got any idea where you are?"

"We sure do. We're right in the middle of the California gold rush of 1849."

"California? What are you doing so far west? Eden is east, isn't it?"

"We don't know what happened exactly, but it seems we all forgot to double check the directional setting before we took off. We'll be sure it's set back to east before we take off again."

"And Only 140 years. Humm. Wonder how far you'll get next time. Well, I guess we'll find that out soon. Anyway, did you learn anything new?"

"Not really, although it was interesting to see them pan for gold."

Walt takes the mike now. "But we've been invited out tonight to a big affair at the local saloon. They call it a shindig. Ever hear the term before?"

Now Mark Lewis' voice comes booming across the airway. "'Shindig'? Yeah, let's see--it's an archaic term for a wild party if I remember right."

"Well, we thought we'd go and see if we could learn anything more about this culture before we try to move on--I mean, if you don't mind."

John's voice comes back. "Just as long as you take-off as soon as possible afterward--like first thing tomorrow morning."

"And," adds Mark, "do be careful. We don't want any problems."

"Don't worry," assures Walt. "We're only going to observe."

Now John's voice is heard again. "How's the cylinder holding up?"

"We lost a few tiles on the outer layer as expected. We'll have to replace them before we move on. It won't take long. We can do it first thing in the morning and then be off. We thought we might find a room in the town for tonight. This capsule's kinda cramped. Keep on this frequency and we'll get back with you when we're ready to leave tomorrow. This is Walt Bryant with Daniel Cohen and Kerry Nadine in California of 1849, signing off for now."

"Alright! We'll be waiting to hear from you guys tomorrow morning. This is John Sterghean in the 21st century. So long."

Mark's voice comes over the speaker again. "Now you fellows be sure to be careful at that shindig! See y' tomorrow. This is Mark Lewis. Over and out."

The communicator is silent once more. Another miracle of modern technology has been tested--the ability to transmit and receive radio signals not only through space but through time as well.

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