

Dream Traveler

Neil Ostroff

Chapter 1

“Nothing happens unless we first dream.”

Carl Sandburg

Mid-afternoon shadows lengthened over Macungie’s orchard and covered the valley floor like a gray river. The hills were cool and fragrant. Birds sang, insects chattered, and little green grasshoppers popped around the drying, early-fall brush. Air barely stirred.

Jamie Richards scratched at a mosquito bite on her arm, un-tucked her brown button-down shirt, and dropped her ninth grade math book on the grass. She pulled her long brown hair into a ponytail, gazed up through the twisty, fruit-heavy branches of the old apple tree and yawned into her hand. The sky was mirror clear except for a tiny ball of cloud suspended lazily above.

A spidery tingle started in her ankles and crept up to her head. Stronger pins and needles trickled through her. Suddenly she was exhausted. As tired as she’d ever been in her whole life. She leaned back against the tree, closed her eyes, and fell into sleep.

I am Vixtan!

Jamie’s eyes fluttered open. “Who said that?”

Tree branches wavered and appeared to freeze in place. She scrambled to her feet.

“Who’s there?”

I am here to collect you.

The cloud dropped from the sky and enveloped the orchard in a dense mist. She looked down. Her body had disappeared. It wasn’t concealed in the mist. It was gone!

Fear spiked. “What’s happening?”

She flapped her hands through the empty space where her chest and stomach should have been, and noticed the person lying beneath the apple tree with her hands pillowed under her head. Disbelief jarred her senses.

“That’s... that’s me!”

The mist swirled and condensed into a thick ball of curling fog.

You do not require a shell to house your spirit as we travel the strings. I will provide a replica of your physical when we reach Phelastia. Your body here will be safe. Your spirit will only be away from this dimension for a few of your time level seconds.

Fear swallowed her. In a shaky voice she asked, “Is this a dream?”

The dream world is as real as the physical.

The cloud of Vixtan enveloped her consciousness and they bolted into the sky, soaring elegantly, riding the soft thermals. It was as if she were two disembodied eyes looking over the world. The borders of the orchard disappeared as they reached the haze of the upper atmosphere and entered into the diffuse glow of thick clouds.

Her belly swooned.

The cloud of Vixtan pulled away from her consciousness and dropped down into the cloudscape. Multi-colored dots of light appeared out of thin air, swirled in a tornado around her, and assembled into her body complete with the brown button-down shirt and blue jeans she'd been wearing in the orchard. The air beneath her feet became a solid, yet marshmallow-consistency turf. She patted her face, her sides, her thighs, wiggled her fingers and toes. It all felt real.

A human-like being, small and rail-thin, rose from where Vixtan had disappeared. Two black, goose egg-size eyes stared at her from above a small, knobby nose and horizontal slot for a mouth. The being wore a gray body suit that covered from head to toe like the skin of a drum.

"Vixtan?" she whispered. "That you?"

The being nodded. "This uniform is what my people looked like before we evolved into pure energy."

Jamie scratched at the mosquito bite on her arm. "Where am I?"

"Not where," Vixtan said. "When. Welcome to the city of Phelastia, three hundred thousand years in your future."

The mist cleared.

A sprawling growth of huge, ivory-colored, geometric-shaped structures jutted into the pearly atmosphere and sparkled in the ultra-bright light shining from a pinpoint sun. A clear spheroid dome formed a soaring roof above the city's gleaming spires and encased the entire metropolis within a colossal, arcing, transparent shield. To their left, a shimmering, silver path cut through the swirling cloudscape and led into the great city.

Jamie stood stunned, slack-jawed, and stupefied.