

# Chapter 1

## A New Reality

A door banged open somewhere to my right. I jumped about a foot in the air. Loud voices were coming in through the open bathroom door.

"Search with extreme caution," said a deep, rough voice, "He is armed and highly dangerous."

Footsteps could now be heard throughout the house. I scrambled to hide behind the door. The creak of a floorboard came from the hallway outside and a man of about forty walked in. He wore a black kevlar vest, gun holster hooked to his belt. I moved backwards, away from him until I felt myself hit something.

Clang!

The sound of something metal falling to the ground. The cop spun around at the noise and saw me, covered in blood, a fallen trash can behind me.

He whipped out his gun.

"On the ground!" he shouted.

I crouched down and put my hands behind my head. The cop grabbed my hands and cuffed me roughly.

"You have the right to remain silent," he said, pulling me to my feet, "Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law."

He led me roughly down a hallway and outside into his

The fluorescent lights buzzed as the interrogation room door opened. A policeman walked in and sat down opposite me.

"You evaded us for quite some time," he said, leaning towards me, "But thanks to an anonymous tip, we finally caught up to you."

"Wait," I said, "I didn't kill that man, I just woke up next to him."

I could no barely speak. Terror and anger were flooding through me as they never had before.

"A poor cover," he said, "what about the other murders then. Decided to nap next to them too?"

"No!" I shouted, "I only know of this one! I swear!"

The cop laughed humorlessly.

"Criminals swear a lot of things that aren't true. You aren't the first."

I couldn't believe it. How could they think I would kill *anybody*, much less multiple people.

"Tell you what," he continued, "You cooperate with us, and I'll see if I can shorten your sentence. How about that?"

What made me do it, I do not know. I shot out of my chair as if it had burnt me, picked it up, and threw it as hard as I could at the cop. While he was distracted, I jumped at him and punched him in the face. He shouted something I didn't hear. I looked up and saw his gun pointed straight at me. Jumping back, I raised my hands in front of my face. I heard a bang and felt white hot pain flood through my body. I clutched at my chest. The cop was approaching me, the weapon still drawn. The edges of my vision were going dark, I was losing so much blood. I lowered my head painfully. My entire vision went black.

In the first moments of consciousness, I was dimly aware of holding something...

## Chapter 2

### Rinse and Repeat

In the first moments of consciousness, I was dimly aware of gripping something. If that wasn't odd enough, the thing, whatever I was holding, felt wet under my fingers. I started to move, and I felt more strange liquid pooled around me. My hands found dry floor and I pushed myself up. I immediately felt my heart drop into my chest. Lying next to me, clearly dead, was a man. Blood was flowing freely from a wound in his chest. The knife clattered to the floor. I looked at it and found the only possible conclusion. *I killed him.*

A door banged open somewhere to my right. I jumped about a foot in the air. Loud voices were coming in through the open bathroom door.

"Search with extreme caution," said a deep, rough voice, "He is armed and highly dangerous."

Footsteps could now be heard throughout the house. I scrambled to hide behind the door. The creak of a floorboard came from the hallway outside and a man of about 40 walked in. He wore a black kevlar vest, a gun holster hooked to his belt, and a scowl. I moved backwards, away from him until I felt myself hit something.

*CLANG!*

The sound of something metal falling to the ground. The cop spun around at the noise and saw me, covered in blood, a fallen trash can behind me.

He whipped out his gun.

"On the ground!" he shouted.

I crouched down and put my hands behind my head. The cop grabbed my hands and cuffed me roughly.

"You have the right to remain silent," he said, pulling me to my feet, "Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law."

He pushed me out of the house and into his car.

The fluorescent lights buzzed as the interrogation room door opened. A policeman walked in and sat down opposite me.

"You evaded us for quite some time," he said, leaning towards me, "But thanks to an anonymous tip, we finally caught up to you."

"Wait," I said, "I didn't kill that man, I just woke up next to him."

"A poor cover," he said, "what about the other murders then. Decided to nap next to them to?"

"No!" I shouted, "I only know of this one! I swear!"

The cop laughed humorlessly.

"Criminals swear a lot of things that aren't true. You aren't the first."

I couldn't believe it. How could they think I would kill *anybody*, much less multiple people.

"Tell you what," he continued, "You cooperate with us, and I'll see if I can shorten your sentence. How about that?"

I could no longer speak. Terror and anger were flooding through me as they never had before. What made me do it, I do not know. I shot out of my chair as if it had burnt me, picked it up, and threw it as hard as I could at the cop. While he was distracted, I jumped at him and punched him in the face. He shouted something I didn't hear. I looked up and saw his gun pointed straight at me. Jumping back, I raised my hands in front of my face. I heard a bang and felt white hot pain flood through my body. I clutched at my chest. The cop was approaching me, weapon still drawn. The edges of my vision were going dark, I was losing so much blood. I lowered my head painfully. My entire vision went black.

In the first moments of consciousness, I was dimly aware of holding something.

## Chapter 3

### Into the City

I sat up, glancing around for a hiding place. Looking up, I saw an attic door. I stretched my hand towards it, pulled it open, and climbed up. The small space was cramped, barely enough room to stand straight, with a singular window in front of me. Closing the door, I heard the familiar rough voice.

"Search with extreme caution," the voice said, "he is armed and highly dangerous."

I hoped beyond hope that this would be the last time I heard that voice. For the first time since waking up, I felt excited. But where would I go? I glanced out the window and saw the cops getting back into their cars and speeding off. They turned around the corner and I let out a sigh of relief. I jumped out the window, landing onto a cushioned deck chair below.

I walked slowly along the street, hiding my face. I could see the silhouette of buildings in the distance, and decided to hide myself in plain sight, among normal, innocent people. The thought made my shudder. I didn't remember killing anyone, but the fact was, I probably did. Overwhelming guilt washed over me. I was ashamed; ashamed of something I don't even remember doing, something I might not even have done.

Absorbed in my thoughts, I barely even registered the world around me, until the trundling motor of a taxi brought me back down to earth. I had walked straight into a bustling city center. Looking around the busy environment, I spotted the very officer who had already arrested me twice. Panicking, I made a beeline towards the closest dark alley. He must have seen me however, for as soon as I had stopped to catch my breath, I heard the click of a pistol behind me and the rough voice calling out.

"On the ground, now!" it said.

I kneeled down and put my hands behind my head.

*Bang.* A gunshot. I waited for the pain, but none came. Instead, I felt something large. I hit the ground beside me. A man, no older than 30, stood over me.

"Come with me," he said in an Australian accent.

I sat up and pulled out the gun with my free hand. He led me to a door hidden in the shadow of a dumpster, took out a key, and unlocked it. He seemed a lot more relaxed after we got inside. He led me to a couch and sat me down.

"Let's take care of that leg of yours," he said.

He shouted in a foreign language over his shoulder.

"Dirk is a doctor, but he only speaks German, so I'll have to translate for you."

The man called Dirk walked in.

He was a medium height, middle-aged man. He looked at the wound in my leg.

While it was being bandaged, I asked the Australian man his name.

"Call me Charles," he said, smiling.

He asked me the same.

"Kris," I told him.

"Kris," he repeated, "Like it."

I leaned back on the couch, looking around the room. It was sparsely decorated, with some tables and chairs in various areas around the room. Lining the east wall were gun cases. Shifting my position, I noticed how tired I was. I lay down on the couch and soon I fell asleep.

I awoke to Charles shaking me awake and the smell of food. I opened my eyes.

"C'mon sleeping beauty! Dinner is served!" He said.

He helped me up and sat me at the dining table. I ate a spoonful of the orange broth.

The taste was savory, with just the right amount of spice.

"This is delicious." I said, "Who made it?"

"Dirk did." Charles said.

"Thanks!" I told him.

We ate in silence for a while, the warm soup soothing my aching body. After everyone had eaten their fill, Charles stood up and collected everyone's bowls and took them to the kitchen. He came back through the doorway yawning.

"Time for sleep everyone!" he announced, then repeated it in German.

"We'll see if we can get you crutches tomorrow," he said to me.

"Thanks" I said, settling into my bed.

"Good night!" Said Charles.

"Night!" I answered.

I lay back and fell asleep almost instantly.

## Chapter 5

### Wrongfully Blamed

I awoke to the smell and sound of sizzling bacon. I sat up blinking the sleep from my eyes. I got out of bed, grabbing the drawer for support.

"Hey, you're up!" Charles said from behind me.

I turned around and saw him. He held a pair of makeshift crutches in his hand, and I took them from him.

"Thanks," I said, using the crutches as support.

"No problem."

He walked into the kitchen, me limping behind him. On the stove were two pans; one with eggs and the other with bacon.

"Hey, can I say something?" I asked him.

"Of course," he said, "Anything!"

"Well..." I said slowly, choosing my words, "you two seem a little, ah, too nice for actual criminals. No offence."

He sighed.

"I know this sounds weird," he said, "but I just woke up in a house with a dead body, with a gun in my hand, not remembering anything that happened before that."

"It's not crazy," I told him, "That's what happened to me."

"Huh," he grunted.

"But where are we?" I asked him.

"That's the thing mate," he leaned in closer, "We've been here a lot longer than you have, and I've noticed subtle differences between here and back home. I've done some research, and I think we are in parallel universes."

We ate in silence.

"So, what are we doing today?" I said.

"We're running out of food, so we need more."

I could see the conversation was going nowhere, so I leaned back and finished my breakfast.

From then on, everything passed in a blur. Waking, eating, buying and stealing, eating, sleeping. Rinse and repeat. After my leg healed, we could be a little more reckless, but not too much. About a week after my leg healed, Charles and I were watching the news when, after the weather forecast, an announcement came on.

"The police chief has just announced that a city-wide search will take place," said the anchor.

"The reason for this search," she continued, "is to locate three wanted murderers, who were recently seen traveling together; Kris Johnson, Charles Bryan, and Dirk Shääfer."

Charles and I looked at each other.

"We need to run." I said.

## Chapter 6

### Hunted

Charles shouted something in German to Dirk, while I grabbed a bag and threw some necessities into it. We burst out the door and climbed up the stairs to the top of the building.

"Do you see anything?" Charles asked.

"Nope," I replied.

We waited in silence as the blue and red lights slowly drove towards us. They pulled over by our building and entered our hideout.

"Ok, let's go," said Charles.

He repeated this in German to Dirk.

We climbed down.

"Anyone know how to hotwire?" I asked, opening the nearest police car door.

"I got it," Charles said, "All you have to do is press these two wires together and..."

The car started with a low rumble..

"Climb in," I said, "I'll drive."

"Get ready for a bumpy ride," I continue, glancing in the rear-view mirror.

I stomp on the gas and we speed onto the street.

"I'm gonna try to get rid of them," I say, spotting the flashing lights behind us.

We fly around a corner and narrowly miss hitting another car, head towards another curve, and see a big tanker truck. I turn sharply, causing the tanker to turn away from us. The weight of the oil caused it to flip it over, spilling everywhere. The first police car slides and slams into the tanker, causing an explosion.

"Oops," I said groaning.

"Who cares!" said Charles, laughing, "That was awesome!"

Swerving around the corner, I saw an alley, with a truck close to passing in front of it. I pressed my foot down as far as possible and sped through the gap.

We ditched the car and climbed up the side to the roof. The truck started going again, and the cops pulled over and walked into the alley.

We waited for them to leave, and finally could relax.

"I've been thinking," said Charles, "I went to the library and snatched some books on parallel universes a while back. I'm stumped though. I can't make any major breakthroughs, though, since parallel universes are 'theoretical'. Nobody seems to know how they actually work."

We stole a car and drove to a small town in the middle of nowhere. We decided to spend the rest of the night in an abandoned warehouse there. As I lay there in the dark, I wondered how we were ever going to get back to our universe. I wasn't the most scientific person in the world, and I knew that I couldn't figure it out on my own. We were going to need to get help from someone else. I stared at the ceiling and fell asleep.

## Chapter 7

### Severed Ties

In the first moments of consciousness, I was dimly aware of holding something.

I sit bolt upright. I look at the body beside me.

“No, Charles!”

I hear the cops outside the door.

“Search with extreme caution. He is armed and dangerous.”

I start to panic. The door bursts open and the cop points his gun at me.

“Dirk! What are you doing!” I gasp at the cop’s familiar face. He smirks, and my heart sinks.

“Auf Wiedersehen,” he says and then pulls the trigger.

I wake up, covered in sweat.

We decided to pack up and leave that morning. I climbed into the driver’s seat, and we drove off aimlessly, hoping to find some other town where we can live without being seen. We would drive to a town and settle down and then have to leave when someone tips off the police. Over and over. We became famous for our notorious escapes. Or maybe infamous would be a better word. One night we parked outside a small town computer store, and slipped in under the cover of darkness.

“Ready?” Charles asked.

Dirk and I nodded.

“Ok,” he said, “I’ll pick the lock. Put your masks on.”

We took our ski masks out and pulled them over our heads. The lock clicked.

“Remember,” Charles said, “only grab what we planned, nothing else.”

He opened the door. We sneak in searching for one specific item. It was Dirk who saw it first.

“Here,” he said.

I ran to where the voice originated from, Charles close behind.

We turn our attention to where he was pointing. Sure enough, there it was.

“Exactly what we need,” Charles says grabbing the laptop.

We walked out of the store and drove away. A coffee shop was right next door so we connected to the wifi and started searching everything we could about parallel universes. We stayed up all night looking at every website and keyword. Almost all that came up were just science fiction novels. Eventually we stumbled upon a news article describing some sort of machine being developed by a rich scientist. According to him, the machine acts like a normal microwave, only much more powerful.

“The device works in stages,” he said, “First, the power is that of a normal microwave, only enough to boil water. Then it increases, separating individual atoms from said water. After



that ions are created, and the atoms break up, then the nucleus, creating a sort of plasma, then to Gluon Plasma. The final stage affects space itself, even spacetime becomes unstable, until finally a portal of sorts opens, allowing matter to transfer through universes.”

After doing a quick search on where the scientist lived, I determined the location to be in the same city as us.

“Ready for a road trip?” I ask Charles.

“Yeah,” answered Charles, “I’ll tell Dirk.”

Five minutes later we were in the car heading towards the lab. We parked a block away and walked. The back door was locked, so Charles picked it.

“Watch for cameras,” I tell the others, “This place is bound to have tons of them.”

We kept to the shadows, watching for cameras. A door stood ajar to our right. Charles sped up slightly and read the plaque bolted to it.

“This is it, mate,” he said, peering through the crack.

I walked up behind him and pushed on the door, which swung smoothly open. In front of us was a complex control panel, its many lights blinking softly. We walked inside, gazing through a large plexiglass panel at a huge platform surrounded by what looked like three large satellite dishes connected to large sci-fi looking boxes. Dirk heads towards a security panel and types something on a keyboard placed in front of a large display.

“What are you doing?” I asked, “There could be an alarm if you get the password wrong!”

Dirk held up a finger and pressed a final button. The system booted up.

“Welcome.” said a cool female voice.

It seemed to come from everywhere, a voice emanating from every corner of the room.

“Please choose a voice setting,” said the voice, then it repeated the sentence in a few different languages. Once the voice spoke in German, Dirk perked up and then typed a few more keys.

The voice started jabbering instructions in German to Dirk, who followed them to a tee. His hands flew across the controls, pressing various buttons and flipping various switches.

Finally Dirk walked away from the controls and motioned for us to get on the platform, which we did. Dirk looked at us and Charles gave him the thumbs up. Dirk flipped a final switch and what I took for satellite dishes whirled to life around us. The air around us felt both hot and cold at the same time. Then, suddenly, one of the red buttons above the machine started flashing and an extremely loud alarm sounds in our ears. Dirk looks at us with fear in his eyes and we all sprint towards the exit. Charles and I dive out just as the door closes behind us. We whip around, and see Dirk is trapped inside. We watch helplessly through the window as the room gets torn apart. The pieces, along with Dirk, got sucked into the newly made portal. With a final deafening explosion, the portal vanished, leaving only bits of rubble behind.

“No!” Charles screams.

He ran to the door and shoved it open, looking wildly around for Dirk. Absorbed in our fear and disbelief, we didn’t notice the cops until I heard a gun click behind my head.

## Chapter 8

### Strange Worlds

"I'm coming!" I said impatiently as the guard shoved me forward roughly. I walked into an interrogation room for the second time in my life. I caught my reflection in the mirror as I walked

in. My hair was long and filthy. Being on the run does that to a man. We both sat down. The guard grinned at us malevolently.

"Two of the most wanted men in the world in the same precinct." he said, his eyes full of vindictive glee. "But where's the third?" he asked, looking at us both in turn.

I started to speak, but my voice caught in my throat. The memory was still painful, even in this dingy police station.

"All right, then. Keep your secrets." the cop says, his smile widening, "Maybe a few days in the block will loosen your tongue."

I had never been in jail before, which was a serious accomplishment considering I've been wanted for months now. Even the other times, before I met Charles, I had escaped, or died, before I had the chance to be put behind bars. Now, however, was not a good time for reminiscing. We had to break out.

I peered through the bars of my cell at Charles.

"Hey," I whispered at him, "Charles."

"Be quiet, you!" shouted a guard, banging in the bars with his baton.

I glared at him, then leaned against the wall.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

Charles was tapping on the bars.

*Tap, tap,-- taptap.*

Then I understood. Morse code.

*A,N,Y I,D,E,A,S*

I quickly slid over to the bars of my cell.

*N,O Y,O,U,?*

He thought for a minute, then stuck his hand into his shoe, and pulled out a small set of lockpicks.

I glanced at the guard. He had fallen asleep. I gave Charles the thumbs up and he reached through the bars and started working at the lock.

A few silent minutes later I heard a loud clunk as the lock came free. The guard shifted in his sleep, but his eyes still remained resolutely closed. Charles opened the door carefully and crept to mine. A few more minutes and I too was free. I looked at the guard's gun in its holster.

"Think we should risk it?" I asked him, quietly.

"Depends," he said, also looking at it, "Reckon we should try a drawer first?"

I nodded and crept past the guard. I reached out to open the drawer, but the guard gave a snort and woke up. The moment he saw us he pulled out his gun.

"What are you doing here?" he yelled, training his pistol at me.

Behind him, Charles picked up the guard's chair and smacked him over the head with it. The guard crumpled, his gun clattering to the floor. Charles walked forward and picked it up.

"Thanks," I sighed, leaning against the desk.

"No problem," he said, reloading the gun, "Check in that drawer, please."

I pulled open the drawer. Inside sat a taser.

Placing it in my pocket, I slowly moved towards the door, trying not to activate any alarms. I saw a door with a keypad on it. I took the taser out of my pocket.

"Do you think this will work?" I asked Charles.

"I don't know," he replied, "but I don't have any better ideas."

I jammed the taser into the keypad and turned it on. Sparks arced across the buttons, then the display cracked. I hear the lock unhinge and I open the door. Behind was a dark lobby, watched carefully by a security camera.

"What do you think?" I asked him, gesturing at the camera.

He looked at me as if I was dumb, then shot it.

"Are you sure that was a good idea?" I asked.

"Nope," he said, and walked through the door.

I sighed and rolled my eyes. Typical Charles.

We crept around the corner, disappearing into an alley.

"We gotta leave town," said Charles, turning to me.

"You think?" I said, sarcastically.

I followed him into a parking lot, where we hijacked a car. Charles had just finished hotwiring when I saw flashing lights come around the corner.

"We have company!" I shouted at Charles, who looked up.

He swore loudly and stomped on the gas. The car shot forward, straight past the police cars. I yanked the gun from Charles's pocket and fired once toward the lead car. Its front light goes out and I try to shoot again, but the gun jams, so I put it down and look for anything else to distract them with. I grab the taser, duct tape out of the glovebox, and tape down the trigger. Then I chuck it as hard as I can towards the car's windshield. It shattered, hitting the driver square in the chest. The cop slumped in his seat, causing the car to spin out of control. It turned sharply around, smashing headlong into the car behind it. The cars in the rear swerved wildly to avoid the collision, forcing them to drive down a side street. Charles turned into an alley before the remaining cars merge back onto the road. We stopped as soon as they were out of sight, and backtracked to where two police cars had smashed into a building. I tore open the door of the least damaged car, pulling out the officer. We search for anything of value, but find nothing except for a pack of gum and a receipt from Taco Bell. I crawl into his car and reach into his glove box. I see the stock of something and pull it out. It turns out to be an smg.

"Jackpot!" I call to Charles who was searching through the other car.

"What is it?" he replies. I pull out two pistols. We walked back into the alley. We continued to walk down the alley. I looked to my left and jumped back in surprise. An old man with long white hair and ragged clothes was slumped on the ground, looking depressed.

When I passed him he looked up. A small device that looked somewhat like a small cracked walkie-talkie beeped feebly beside him. The man glanced at it, startled, then looked back at us, a hopeful gleam in his eyes.

"You aren't from here, are you," he said.

It wasn't a question. He knew something.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He looked at me for a minute before answering.

"You aren't from this universe."

Charles looked at me, frightened.

"He knows," I hiss at him, "He can help us."

I felt an unexplainable sense of trust towards this man. I felt, somehow, that he could help us home.

The man stood up and offered us his hand.

"I can help you," he said, "with this."

He held up the small black device.

"It looks broken," said Charles, noticing the cracks in its casing.

The man sighed.

"Alas," he said, "It is. But we can fix it."

I looked at him in confusion.

"How did you know about us not being from here?" I ask.

"That's what this tells me. It senses time anomalies and allows me to access them to jump from universe to universe." The man replies. "In my home universes, we were being taken over by a guy named Hitler."

"Hitler?" I said, "Do you mean the nazi who decided to take over the world, but I guess in our world ended up losing?"

"The very same." he replies, "I was a lead scientist for the Allies, and had just finished a prototype teleport machine. I had no idea if it worked however, so I left it for later testing, once we won the war. However, I received an alert that the Allies had recently lost Britain and the prime minister was coming to America."

"We heard that Hitler might start bombing research facilities soon, so we were ordered to evacuate. However, it turns out our place was number 1 on Hitler's list. I stepped outside for some fresh air, to take in all the news, when I noticed the planes heading our way, each with a large silhouette hanging from them. I knew at once that it was an atomic bomb. I sprinted inside to warn the others, but it was too late. As a last resort, I grabbed my teleporter from off the shelf and activated it. The next thing I know, I'm here. It wasn't strong enough to survive going through its own anomaly, and became cracked and fried like it is now. So now it only partially works."

Charles and I looked at him, shocked.

"I know this is a lot to take in," he said, "but I need your help."

"Us? How can we help?"

"I need to find parts to fix my teleporter, and I can tell, at least this can, that you just tried to go through a portal. Maybe it has parts to fix mine."

We drove towards the teleport lab with a growing sense of foreboding. The place felt like a curse since Dirk disappeared. I stopped the car by the sidewalk. The entrance door was still open. I shivered as I got closer. We slipped inside. It looked exactly as it had when I left. We opened the door to the lab. The room was in disarray. Pieces of the teleporter were scattered everywhere. The man walked up to one of the fallen satellite dishes.

"This is huge," he said.

"This is probably older tech than yours," I said, "But some parts should be the same, right?"

The man dug around in the rubble for a bit, then pulled out a small metal tube that looked like the letter 'i'.

"Aha!" he said triumphantly, "The microwave unit. A bit older than my current one but at least it works."

He pulled open his device, pulled out a piece from the inside, and replaced it with the one he just found. It beeped loudly and the man smiled.

"Yes," he said, "Can tune it to my universe, then you can have it to find yours."

He twiddled a dial on the front and pressed a button. The air around him shimmered, then a jagged portal appeared, revealing a field on the other side.

"Farewell," the man said, and walked through the portal.

The opening started to shrink, and just before it closed for good, the device fell through, clattering to the floor.

I walked over to it and picked it up. It was heavier than I expected. I turned the dial randomly.

"What do you think?" I asked, glancing at Charles.

"Honestly, no idea. I guess there is way ahead of whatever I was working with back home."

I started to examine the console of the now nonexistent teleporter. I noticed a short USB to Mini USB cord attached to the console. I pulled out the small unit and found a USB C port on the bottom.

"Hey Charles! Check this out." I called to him. "Can you figure this out?"

"Looks like a generic USB C port," he said.

After rummaging around in some drawers for a bit, he walked over and connected the console to the device. A window popped up on the console. Charles reached over and clicked upload. A loading screen popped up, slowly building up in percent. It was almost finished when I heard a loud bang on the front door.

"Police, open up!"

I looked at Charles, and then back at the console. It was still at 96 percent. The cops burst into the room and pointed their guns at us. I raised my hands in the air, grabbing the device. The cop nearest to me told me to hand over what I was holding. I held it out for him, but at the last second, pressed the button. A portal appeared next to the device. The cops yelled in shock and confusion, and in the split second hesitation, I jumped in, Charles at my heels.

## Chapter 9

### Home

I felt my feet hit solid ground. My legs gave way and I crumpled on the ground. A dull thump told me Charles had landed right next to me. I took a minute to come to my senses. We were lying on cool grass. I rolled onto my back and opened my eyes. The sky above was a cloudless blue. I sat up and looked around. We had landed in a domed in area, rather like a public park or greenhouse. The trees were an alien green, and the leaves were a dark purple. A large crowd had gathered around us now. They were looking at us like we were some strange monster in a zoo. A tall, muscular man in a metallic gray shirt marched over to us.

“You two,” he said in a deep voice, “Come with me.”

We followed reluctantly. He did not look like someone to trifle with.

He led us through enclosed glass passages until we emerged onto a large marble pathway. Ahead of us loomed a huge silver building. The doors opened as we approached and we walked inside. He led us into a chamber lock and closed the doors. Immediately we felt ourselves become weightless and we floated into the center of the room. A tractor beam pointed at where the teleporter rested in my pocket and it started to drift away from me.

"No!" I said, reaching out for it, but it was too far away.

Then suddenly, as if gravity had just been switched back on, we fell to the floor in a heap.

I looked up in time to see the teleporter float into the man's hand.

"What have we here?" he asked.

"It's a multiverse teleporter," I explained, "It's how we got here."

The man looked intrigued for a moment, but then he looked back at us.

"We'll see about that," he said, then motioned for us to follow.

We followed him into a room with two back-to-back chairs.

"Sit down," the man said, and we did.

He walked over to a display on the wall and tapped a button. Two identical bowl-shaped devices lowered onto our heads.

"What is this," I said, surprised.

"A lie detector," he said, approaching us both, "Now, I'm going to ask you some questions, and I want you to answer them truthfully."

I tried to nod, but the lie detector was keeping my head straight up. The man started walking in circles around us.

"Why did you come here?" he asked, continuing to circle.

"We were being chased," said Charles, "So we went to the first place the teleporter took us to."

A soft *ding* sounded from above us.

"Where did you find this device?"

"Some old scientist guy gave it to us," it was me who spoke this time.

"Why would he give you such a thing?"

"We were trapped in a universe that wasn't our own, so he was helping us," Charles explained.

"How did you get trapped in a different universe?"

"We just woke up somewhere totally different," I replied. "I woke up with a knife in my hand, and Charles woke up with a gun. We both were accused of killing someone."

The detector chimed again and the man looked surprised.

"I will say, I did not expect that part to be true," he admitted.

"Final, question," he continued, looking confused, "Do you mean any harm to our society?"

"No," I said firmly.

The lie detector chimed for the last time, and the man let us out of our seats.

"You are free to go," he told us.

"Nice," said Charles, relieved.

"Wait," I said, "Can't we have our teleporter back? We need a way to get back home."



The man hesitated for a moment.

"No," he said finally, "I'm afraid not. Anything classified as 'potentially dangerous' has to be destroyed."

"Destroyed!" I shouted angrily, "How else are we going to get home!"

"We have no other way to ensure the safety of our people," he said weakly.

The man did not sound entirely truthful, but I was so angry I didn't notice.

"Well, that's just great, isn't it," I shouted, but the man cut me off.

"We will secure a hotel room for one night," he said over my continuous shouting, "after that you will have to find your own way. *You may go!*"

He slammed the door in my face.

I lay down in the dreary hotel room hours later, running today's events through my mind.

*How could they!* I thought savagely, but then I remembered.

"Hey, Charles," I whispered through the darkness.

"Yeah?" replied a dejected voice.

"Remember when that man was telling us there was no other way for us to get home?"

I couldn't make out his face in the dark, but I could tell he was confused.

"Yeah," he said slowly.

"Do you remember how he sounded?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I *mean*, that he didn't sound entirely truthful."

"Really? I guess I was a little too relieved to get out of there, and then too shocked when he said he was going to destroy it to notice."

"There was just something about his voice that wasn't quite right. I wonder if he knows another way out but he can't tell us."

Charles sighed. "Maybe, but why would they not just let us go? I mean it's not like we are going to tell the world about it. And besides, if he had that big of a responsibility to keep it a secret, you'd think he would be good at his job."

"Well I'm not giving up hope."

"Good for you." Charles said, almost sarcastically, and rolled over in his bed. "Night."

It took a long time for me to fall asleep, and when I did, my dreams were filled with Dirk disappearing in a flash of light, the muscular man laughing in the background.

I woke up the next day feeling as tired as ever. Judging from the shadows under Charles' eyes, I could tell he felt the same way.

From the moment we left the hotel, we felt as if we were being followed. Whether it be downtown or inside the stores, an unknown presence seemed to be watching our every move.

Charles and I seemed to be thinking the same unspoken thing. We both had been trapped here long enough to become desperate to escape. As we approached the door to our hotel room, I caught his eye and he nodded.

The alarm beeped once, but I quickly silenced it. Charles slowly turned the door handle, opened it just enough to squeeze through, and disappeared behind it. I followed suit, shutting

the door quietly behind me. Every sound was magnified in the silent hall. Out on the dark street, we stayed to the shadows, pressing ourselves against the wall at any movement. A marble white building stood a block away from us, metal letters set across the top.

**Astley Research and Development Center**

"This look like the place," Charles breathed.

I nodded.

We walk to a window left slightly ajar, and slip in, landing softly onto carpet.

I walked over to the office door and poked my head out into the hall. A guard stood at the end of the hallway, back facing us. He suddenly turned around and I quickly shut the door, maybe a little too quickly. The door slammed against the frame. I could hear the guard's footsteps coming towards the door. Charles and I dove under the desk. The door creaked open and the guard entered. Charles jerked his head at the guard as he passed, and I got the message. I crawled out from under the desk and jumped at the guard, putting him in a headlock. Charles took a pistol out of the guard's pocket and pointed it at the guards face. He immediately froze up. I freed his neck, backed away from him, grabbed the computer screen from the desk, and swung it down on his head.

Charles lowered the gun and looked at me. I shrugged.

We walked into the hallway. Doors on either side led to hallways. We approached the door at the end of the halway.

Multiverse Portal

DANGER

I eased the door open slowly. A large room, bigger than the first room, consoles and computers lined the walls.

"This is it," Charles whispered.

I nodded. Somehow, I could tell he was right.

Charles walked forward.

"It's on," he said.

I walked up to him. A screen with a blank text box was in front of him.

"DNA sample?" Charles read.

"It must need our DNA to take us back home," I said.

Charles produced a safety pin from his pocket and handed it to me.

"You go first," he said.

"No, I couldn't," I said, backing up a pace.

"I insist."

I took it from him.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked.

"Yes."

I made a small pinprick on my right thumb and dropped it into a small receptacle.

The screen flashed green.

"Sample accepted," I read, "it worked."

A door hissed open, leading to the reactors center. I didn't move.

"Go on," Charles said softly.

I walked silently through the door and stood on the raised platform. Charles looked up at me, and smiled in a solemn way. The copper wrapped magnets on either side of me started to spin, I felt simultaneously hot and cold, my vision went white, then I felt nothing at all.

In the first moments of consciousness, I was dimly aware of soft carpet beneath me. I sat up and looked around what looked like a living room, *my* living room.

All the memories that had been repressed for months came flooding back to me. It was overwhelming, but the happiest day of my life.

### ***Epilogue***

#### **1 Week Later**

As I sat on my couch, I contemplated the events that had to have taken place to cause me to enter a whole other dimension, and why months of my life had been wasted, but no time had passed at all.

Suddenly the lights flickered out, the air around me suddenly felt full of electricity. The air in front of me started to warp in strange ways, as if the air itself had started to melt. Then I felt it, the feeling of hot and cold, a flash of white light. A familiar figure stood in front of me.

"Kris, I need your help," said Charles, "Dirk is in trouble."