

PROLOGUE

HISTORY is not only a collection of facts; it is a spider's web of *ifs*. If Napoleon had not lost the Battle of Waterloo, if the American colonies had lost the Revolution, if the South and not the North had won the Civil War . . . The procession of such *ifs* is endless, exciting the imagination and spurring endless speculation. Sometimes the all important turning point can be compressed into a single small action—the death of one man, a seemingly casual decision.

And if the larger history of a nation, or a world, depends upon so many chance *ifs*, so also does the personal history of each and every one of us. Because we are five minutes late or ten minutes early for an appointment, because we catch one bus but miss another, our life is completely changed.

There exists a fascinating theory that two worlds branch from every bit of destiny action. Hence, there are far reaching bands of parallel worlds, born of many historical choices. Thus, if some means of communication could be devised a man might travel, not backwards or forwards in time, but across it to visit, for example, a contemporary world which resulted from a successful Viking colonization of the North American continent, or one in which William the Conqueror never ruled England.

Since this game can be envisioned on Earth, then why could it not also hold on other planets out in the galaxy when men of our breed go pioneering there?

Imagine a world on which a Terran ship or fleet of ships

STAR GATE

lands. The space-weary voyagers, mutated physically by the effects of their wandering, greet solid soil thankfully. There is a native race, primitive to the point of barbarism. There is so much the Terrans have to give, so without realizing their crime, they meddle. As the generations come and go they begin to realize that each race must have its own fight for civilization, that gifts too easily obtained are injuries, that its own destiny is the birthright of each world.

So, regretfully, the "Gods" from the stars know that they have already woefully harmed where they meant only good, that to save what may be salvaged they must go. However, there are those of the half-blood, a mingling of Terran and native breed, and there are those among the Terrans themselves who do not want the stars, the endless new searching for a hospitable world on which there is no intelligent native life.

Thus the old idea of parallel worlds awakes anew and some dream wistfully of this same planet where some quirk of history or the past decided against the rise of native life—the empty world they want and yet the familiar one they love and are bound to by many ties.

Next would begin a search for a pathway across the many *if* worlds, a gate to open to such exploring. And there would be many worlds—even some in which their own landing and their labors had taken a darker and more forbidding turn, a world on which they might even meet themselves as they would be when walking another lane of history and influenced by another past.

These Terrans centuries ahead of us, armed with technical knowledge we can only imagine, might venture forth across time of an alien world, which could lead to just such a chronicle of action beyond a Star Gate. . . .