



## Beyond the Blue Event Horizon (Heechee)

By Frederik Pohl

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The story begins when the hero of *Gateway* finances an expedition to a distant alien spaceship that may end famine forever. On the ship, the explorers find a human boy, and evidence that reveals a powerful alien civilization is thriving on a transport ship headed right for Earth....

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“Certainly very few books have ever held my attention in such an iron grip right up until the last paragraph, built so irresistibly to such a satisfying series of blockbuster punch lines, left me so breathless with admiration, achieved such truly cosmic scope.” *?Analog*

“The kind of mind-opening conceptualization that makes the universe seem very vast and beautiful indeed. In short, this is a book that fulfills SF's ability to entertain intelligently.” *?The Chicago Sun-Times*

“Peerless in his own generation, with few equals of any age. One of the fifty most influential people in the Chicago book world.” *?News City (Chicago)*

“Gateway is one of those rare gems: a deeply human story set against the wonders and beauty of the infinite starry universe. Fred Pohl, Old Master that he is, has broken new ground for the science-fiction novel.” *?Ben Bova, Editor, Analog on Gateway*

“ . . . an engrossing story, a different but worthy successor to Gateway.” *?Publishers Weekly on Gateway*

“[Frederik Pohl's] special combination of scientific imagination, humane concern, and sheer literary craftsmanship is something unique.” *?Jack Williamson on Gateway*

### About the Author

A multiple Hugo, Nebula, and John W. Campbell Award–winning author, FREDERIK POHL has also been a groundbreaking editor in the field, and was named a Grand Master of the Science Fiction Writers of America. He and his wife, Elizabeth Anne Hull, a prominent academic, live near Chicago, Illinois.

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### Chapter One

#### Wan

It was not easy to live, being young, being so completely alone. “Go to the gold, Wan, steal what you want, learn. Don’t be afraid,” the Dead Men told him. But how could he not be afraid? The silly but worrisome Old Ones used the gold passages. They might be found anywhere in them, most likely at the ends of them, where the gold skeins of symbols ran endlessly into the center of things. That is, exactly here the Dead Men kept coaxing him to go. Perhaps he had to go there, but he could not help being afraid.

Wan did not know what would happen if the Old Ones ever caught him. The Dead Men probably knew, but he could not make any sense out of their ramblings on the subject. Once long ago, when Wan was tiny—when his parents were still alive, it was that long ago—his father had been caught. He had been gone for a long time and then had come back to their green-lit home. He was shaking, and two-year-old Wan had seen that his father was afraid and had screamed and roared because that was so frightening to him.

Nevertheless he had to go to the gold, whether the grave old frog-jawed ones were there or not, because that was where the books were. The Dead Men were well enough. But they were tedious, and touchy, and often obsessed. The best sources of knowledge were books, and to get them Wan had to go where they were.

The books were in the passages that gleamed gold. There were other passages, green and red and blue, but there were no books there. Wan disliked the blue corridors, because they were cold and dead, but that was where the Dead Men were. The green was used up. He spent most of his time where the winking red cobwebs of light were spread against the walls and the hoppers still held food; he was sure to be untroubled there, but he was also alone. The gold was still in use, and therefore rewarding, and therefore also perilous. And now he was there, cursing fretfully to himself—but under his breath—because he was stuck. Bloody damn Dead Men! Why did he listen to their blathering?

He huddled, trembling, in the insufficient shelter of a berry bush, while two of the foolish Old Ones stood thoughtfully plucking berries from its opposite side and placing them precisely into their froggy mouths. It was unusual, really, that they should be so idle. Among the reasons Wan despised the Old Ones was that they were always busy, always fixing and carrying and chattering, as though driven. Yet here these two were, idle as Wan himself.

Both of them had scraggly beards, but one also had breasts. Wan recognized her as a female he had seen a dozen times before; she was the one who was most diligent in pasting colored bits of something—paper? plastic?—onto her sari, or sometimes onto her sallow, mottled skin. He did not think they would see him, but he was greatly relieved when, after a time, they turned together and moved away. They did not speak. Wan had almost never heard any of the grave old frog-jaws speak. He did not understand them when they did. Wan spoke six languages well—his father's Spanish, mother's English, the German, the Russian, the Cantonese and the Finnish of one or another of the Dead Men. But what the frog-jaws spoke he did not comprehend at all.

As soon as they had retreated down the golden corridor—quick, run, grab! Wan had three books and was gone, safely back in a red corridor. It might be that the Old Ones had seen him, or perhaps not. They did not react quickly. That was why he had been able to avoid them so long. A few days in the passages, and then he was gone. By the time they had become aware he was around, he wasn't; he was back in the ship, away.

He carried the books back to the ship on top of a pannier of food packets. The drive accumulators were nearly recharged. He could leave whenever he liked, but it was better to charge them all the way and he did not think there was any need to hurry. He spent most of an hour filling plastic bags with water for the tedious journey. What a pity there were no readers in the ship to make it less tedious! And then, wearying of the labor, he decided to say good-bye to the Dead Men. They might, or might not, respond, or even care. But he had no one else to talk to.

Wan was fifteen years old, tall, stringy, very dark by nature and darker still from the lights in the ship, where he spent so much of his time. He was strong and self-reliant. He had to be. There was always food in the hoppers, and other goods for the taking, when he dared. Once or twice a year, when they remembered, the Dead Men would catch him with their little mobile machine and take him to a cubicle in the blue passages for a boring day during which he was given a rather complete physical examination. Sometimes he had a tooth filled, usually he received some long-acting vitamin and mineral shots, and once they had fitted him with glasses. But he refused to wear them. They also reminded him, when he neglected it too long, to study and learn, both from them and from the store houses of books. He did not need much reminding. He enjoyed learning. Apart from that, he was wholly on his own. If he wanted clothes, he went into the gold and stole them from the Old Ones. If he was bored, he invented something to do. A few days in the passages, a few weeks on the ship, a few more days in the other place, then back to repeat the process. Time passed. He had

no one for company, had not had since he was four and his parents disappeared, and had almost forgotten what it was like to have a friend. He did not mind. His life seemed complete enough to him, since he had no other life to compare it with.

Sometimes he thought it would be nice to settle in one place or another, but this was only dreaming. It never reached the stage of intention. For more than eleven years he had been shuttling back and forth like this. The other place had things that civilization did not. It had the dreaming room, where he could lie .at and close his eyes and seem not to feel alone. But he could not live there, in spite of plenty of food and no dangers, because the single water accumulator produced only a trickle. Civilization had much that the outpost did not have: the Dead Men and the books, scary exploring and daring raids for clothes or trinkets, something *happening*. But he could not live there either, because the frog-jaws would surely catch him sooner or later. So he commuted.

The main lobby door to the place of the Dead Men did not open when Wan stepped on the treadle. He almost bumped his nose. Surprised, he stopped and then gingerly pushed against the door, then harder. It took all his strength to force it open. Wan had never had to open it by hand before, though now and then it had hesitated and made disturbing noises. That was an annoyance. Wan had experienced machines that broke down before; it was why the green corridors were no longer very useful. But that was only food and warmth, and there was plenty of that in the red, or even the gold. It was worrisome that anything should go wrong around the Dead Men, because if they broke down he had no others.

Still, all looked normal; the room with the consoles was brightly fluoresced, the temperature was comfortable and he could hear the faint drone and rare click of the Dead Men behind their panels as they thought their lonely, demented thoughts and did what ever they did when he was not speaking to them. He sat in his chair, shifting his rump as always to accommodate to the ill-designed seat, and pulled the headset down over his ears.

“I am going to the outpost now,” he said.

There was no answer. He repeated it in all of his languages, but no one seemed to want to talk. That was a disappointment. Sometimes two or three of them would be eager for company, maybe even more. Then they could all have a nice, long chat, and it would be as though he were not really alone at all. Almost as though he were part of a “family,” a word he knew from the books and from what the Dead Men told him, but hardly remembered as a reality. That was good. Almost as good as when he was in the dreaming place, where for a while he could have the illusion of being part of a hundred families, a million families. Hosts of people! But that was more than he could handle for very long. And so, when he had to leave the outpost to return for water, and for the more tangible company of the Dead Men, he was never sorry. But he always wanted to come back to the cramped couch and the velvety metal blanket that covered him in it, and to the dreams.

It was waiting for him; but he decided to give the Dead Men another chance. Even when they were not eager for talk, sometimes they were interestable if addressed directly. He thought for a moment, and then dialed number fifty-seven.

A sad, distant voice in his ear was mumbling to itself: “... tried to tell him about the missing mass. Mass! The only mass on *his* mind was twenty kilos of boobs and ass! That .oozy, Doris. One look at her and, oh, boy, forget about the mission, forget about me....”

Frowning, Wan poised his finger to cancel. Fifty-seven was such a nuisance! He liked to listen to her when she made sense, because she sounded a little like the way he remembered his mother. But she always seemed to go from astrophysics and space travel and other interesting subjects directly to her own troubles. He spat

at the point in the panels behind which he had elected to believe fifty-seven lived—a trick he had learned from the Old Ones—hoping she would say something interesting.

But she didn't seem to intend to. Number fifty-seven—when she was coherent she liked to be called Henrietta—was babbling on about high redshifts and Arnold's infidelities with Doris. Whoever they were. "We could have been heroes," she sobbed, "and a ten-million-dollar grant, maybe more, who knows what they'd pay for the drive? But they kept on sneaking off in the lander, and— Who are you?"

"I'm Wan," the boy said, ...

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