

Advice for Wormhole Travelers

Sometimes I meet people in one of these places who are really upset because the wormhole door causes vertigo. And I'm like, wormhole *door*? You got lucky, my pal. With a wormhole door, you just focus on the corners, the right angles will keep you oriented while you're spinning, so you know what to expect when the spinning stops.

It's the arches and the plain holes that'll really get you. Much less to focus on to orient, can't spot yourself, don't know which end is up when you land. I like to think that the aliens who built the network were basically benevolent--because if not, hahaha we're kinda screwed, amirite?--but I feel like the doors are the best sign of their benevolence.

I like to think that the plain holes weren't on purpose, they just didn't have time to finish them. And then I stop thinking about that as fast as I can, because what could stop an ancient megacivilization that was building a wormhole network through the galaxy from finishing their project? None of the options seem good.

So yeah, you keep your eyes as fixed on the corners of the wormhole door as you can, and you try to roll when you fall. That's the best advice I have for wormhole travel. The rolling thing takes practice--you can do it at a gym or a martial arts studio on the mats--and the holesuits all have padded knees and elbows for this very reason.

I know we're all trying to confirm mapping of the wormhole system, but marking the ones that have wonky gravity and unfinished--okay, fine, *plain*--wormholes seems like one of the highest priorities to me. I've been flipped from floor to ceiling to floor to wall in some of those places, and I hope I've at least warned someone else what they're getting into if they use that route. A lot of people can't take it, or can't take more than a few minutes of it.

Honestly, all the ads for SpaceForce show these physically perfect specimens, teeth even and gleaming, shoulders thrown back proudly. But if you want to know who *I* expect to succeed out here? it's the people who've gotten banged up a little by life. The people with migraines and allergies and balance disorders and C.P. and all that. Sure, we're a little more vulnerable to whatever's on the other end of the trip, but that's more than balanced out by the ability to roll with it. That which does not kill us might not make us stronger, but it makes us ready at least.

And there's a lot out there to get ready for. You run into any aliens yet? It's mostly humans in these parts, mostly speaking Spanish, Cantonese, or Swahili, and if you run into someone who doesn't have one of those three, you can still usually work out pantomime with another Earth human. But farther out in the circuit, fall through five or six or ten or twelve more doors, and you start meeting people your mama never warned you about, antlers, tentacles, tendrils, the whole thing. Seven legs, no bilateral symmetry...that's when you really have to roll with it, because those guys aren't quick to take offense, but you *can* get them there. More so if you're taking offense at trifles yourself, like a little flood of acrid seawater, or the tiniest odor of sulfur in the corridors. It ain't hell, kid, it's aliens.

I always thought the old-timers were trying to scare me when they talked about the aliens, but they weren't. I'm not trying to scare you either. It's just that we want you more prepared than we were, and nothing can really prepare you, not all the way. Keep an eye on the perpendiculars, don't move too fast. Keep hold of something once you're in the network, if you can. And for heaven's sake keep notes on where you've been. Even if you never get home, you'll run into someone else. Like me. And what are we here for if we don't share our notes?

Yeah, I've known people who died out here. Who never got home. Some people never want to, some...well, there's a lot out here, and it gets easier and easier to get the kind of lost that

never gets you found again. Once you lose orientation to Earth, maybe you get it back once. Maybe. But it's only a matter of time until you lose it again, and for longer. Maybe forever.

Look, you can turn back now and have a decent chance of being one of the ones who makes it home. You said you're only four hops out, that's well within return likelihood. That's not yet to the point where you're the thing that changes the wormhole. No, nobody proved that. But add it up, do the math yourself. It's either us or it's the more distant wormholes getting weirder and less predictable, and I don't know anything about Earth that would put it near the center of anything. I mean, maybe there's something. I just don't know about it.

Anyway, what I'm saying is, you still have landmarks. You can still find your center if you want to. The question is whether you want to. There's a lot of room out there to, I don't know, be a little off-balance for a while. Find out other ways you can be. Yeah, it's scary. It's gonna be. The world is, without a compass. But if you learn to roll with it--hell, kid, there's nothing like it. Nothing in the universe.

THE END

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