

Shuttlers

Imagine a simple room.

A man walks in and moves to the centre. He has a rucksack on his back. After a moment's concentration, he vanishes.

He may return within minutes, hours, days... or never.

Meanwhile, in a room nearby, a woman appears out of nowhere. She has no rucksack but holds a large object in her arms.

As she staggers forward a step, three people rush to her and relieve her of her burden. She nods to them... then vanishes again.

These are the Shuttlers, beings capable of skipping between realities with little more than a thought and an effort of will.

Listen as two of them meet one another in a corridor, and you'll learn what they are after. And what kind of people they are.

"Hi, Justin. How's it going?"

"Great, Freda. And you? Are you heading out?"

"Yeah. I've found a fantastic place that has the most amazing cloths and materials. They have colours I've never seen before in any world. I'm sure I can get a good price for them in half a dozen other realities."

"Really? What are you going to trade for them?"

"Trade? I've got access to an entire warehouse full of the stuff. I'm just going to 'liberate' whatever takes my fancy. They'll never realise how it went missing."

"Well, good luck, Freda. Just don't try to carry too much. Remember last time? You ended up with a mental hernia and stuck in that reality for a month."

"I won't, Justin. I'll be careful. Anyway, that was a special case. Where are you going?"

"A place that's stuck in the nineteenth century. I've got some stuff I'm sure they'll pay a fortune for there. It'll be out of the world for them. And there may be things worth acquiring in trade, in return." He pulls a face as he says this.

"What's the problem, Justin?"

"*They*," he says, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb at the senior members' lounge, "won't let me do anything more than smuggle stuff into and out of other realities, and bring back gold and jewels. Don't they think I can accomplish more than that?"

From the heady heights of her eighteen years of age, Freda smiles down at Justin.

"You're still a kid, Justin. Nobody'll listen to you because of your age. Wait until you've grown up a bit. I'm sure they'll let you take on more responsibility, then."

Justin nods, a doubtful look plastered across his features.

Both look up as another, older figure brushes past them, grunting in reply to their friendly greetings.

"What's up with Richardson, Freda?"

"Oh, I think he's still having problems getting the culture in his target world to accept him as their god. He's used all sorts of tricks and gadgets to impress them, but nothing's working. It's making him really tetchy."

They both smile and shrug at one another.

"It's certainly not my problem, then."

"Nor mine. You have a good trip."

"You too. See you around."

"Bye."

They go to their rooms, where they vanish to plunder their respective realities.

But what of the worlds these raiders touch on? How are they affected by the visitors?

And who is going to protect those realities from these privations...?