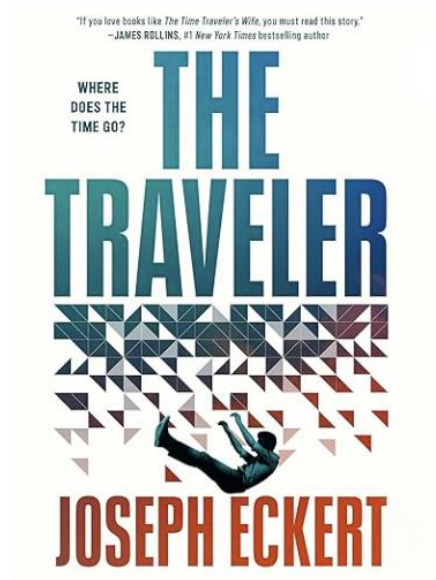




Book Review: *The Traveler*, By Joseph Eckert

A Remarkable Journey Through Time

I checked out the hardcover edition of Joseph Eckert's *The Traveler* from my public library without knowing quite what to expect. What I discovered was an imaginative, emotionally powerful science-fiction novel built around a terrifying question: What if you began jumping uncontrollably into the future—and every jump carried you twice as far as the one before?

Scott Treder is driving to work in Madison, Wisconsin, when his car suddenly disappears around him and sends him tumbling onto the pavement. It is still 7:52 in the morning, but an entire day has passed. The next jump carries him two days forward, the next four, and the intervals continue doubling.

Scott does not control when he leaves, how far he travels, or what will be waiting for him when he returns. While only moments pass for him, days, years, centuries, and eventually far greater spans of time disappear between his arrivals. It is a wonderfully simple premise, but Eckert develops it into an extraordinary voyage through love, loss, faith, and the future of humanity.

Time Travel as a Family Tragedy

Although *The Traveler* explores some enormous scientific and philosophical ideas, the heart of the novel is the relationship between Scott and his seven-year-old son, Lyle. Scott's involuntary travels do not merely carry him into the future; they repeatedly tear him away from his family.

For Scott, each separation feels almost instantaneous. For his wife, Amy, and for Lyle, the intervals must be lived one day at a time. They wait without knowing exactly when—or whether—Scott will return. Their lives continue while his remains almost frozen.

This creates one of the novel's most painful ironies. Scott desperately wants to be a good father, yet forces beyond his control make him appear absent and unreliable. He promises Lyle that he will always come back, but each return is followed by another disappearance.

Lyle, meanwhile, grows older between Scott's jumps. The little boy Scott leaves behind gradually becomes his intellectual equal and then surpasses him in age, knowledge, and experience. Scott must repeatedly rediscover his own son—not simply recognize his older face, but learn who Lyle has become during all the years his father missed.

Rediscovering Lyle

Lyle is no ordinary child. He possesses an extraordinary intellect and becomes determined to understand what is happening to his father. While Scott is helplessly carried forward, Lyle devotes his life to the problem of finding, protecting, and perhaps rescuing him.

Their roles begin to reverse. Scott starts as the father comforting a frightened boy, but Lyle gradually becomes the person guiding his bewildered father through futures Scott can scarcely comprehend. The child once left behind becomes Scott's intellectual anchor and, in many ways, his protector.

This is where the novel moves beyond a clever time-travel story. Scott's repeated rediscovery of Lyle becomes an exploration of parenthood itself. Every parent must eventually accept that a child will grow into a separate person with knowledge, experiences, and convictions of his own. Scott simply confronts that transformation at a speed no parent could possibly endure.

The tragedy is not that Scott stops loving his son. It is that love must somehow survive enormous absences, missed years, and the continual shock of meeting Lyle anew. Their bond is stretched across time almost beyond recognition, yet it remains the emotional thread holding the novel together.

A Voyage of Increasing Danger

Scott's journey becomes more dangerous with every leap. At first, his greatest problems are explaining his absences, protecting his family, and coping with the disruption of ordinary life. As the intervals expand, however, the familiar world begins to vanish.

Buildings, governments, technologies, languages, and entire societies can rise and fall between two consecutive moments of Scott's life. Every arrival becomes a gamble. The place where he disappeared may no longer be safe—or may no longer exist in any form he recognizes.

Scott has almost no opportunity to prepare for what comes next. He is not the confident master of a time machine, selecting destinations and observing history from a protected seat. He is a passenger trapped inside a process he does not understand. The future does not politely wait for him; it strikes him without warning.

Eckert handles this escalating danger effectively. The novel begins with a personal mystery, expands into an adventure across human history, and gradually assumes a cosmic scale. Yet even as the distances become almost unimaginable, Scott remains recognizably human: frightened, confused, stubborn, and driven by his longing to find Lyle again.

The Mystery of “the Word”

One of the novel’s most intriguing ideas is “the Word,” a body of belief that develops around the mysterious figure known as the Traveler. To say much about its origins or development would spoil some of the book’s finest surprises, but the concept deserves mention because it gives the novel much of its philosophical depth.

As Scott jumps across immense stretches of time, firsthand knowledge of him becomes impossible to preserve through ordinary memory. Facts become stories, stories become legends, and legends acquire the power of faith. The Word carries the Traveler’s identity forward through generations that will never meet the man himself.

The Word serves an important practical purpose: It helps future societies recognize Scott, understand his strange appearances, and protect him when he arrives. Without some enduring account of the Traveler, he might be treated as an intruder, a madman, or a threat every time he emerges.

Yet the Word is also troubling. Scott knows himself as an ordinary and deeply imperfect man, but distant generations encounter him as a figure of prophecy. He becomes a symbol claimed by people who have built beliefs, institutions, and expectations around his journey.

That tension raises some fascinating questions. Can a story remain true after being repeated for centuries? Does it still belong to the person whose life inspired it? What happens when a man is forced to live inside a legend created in his name?

The Word is both a shield and a burden. It preserves Scott across time, but it also threatens to replace him. The farther he travels, the greater the distance between Scott the frightened father and the Traveler revered by people in the future.

Faith, Myth, and Human Memory

Eckert does not use the Word merely to make a simple argument for or against religion. Instead, he explores why people create sacred stories and how those stories allow meaning to survive after individual memory has disappeared.

The Word preserves love, sacrifice, and hope, but it also demonstrates how easily history can become mythology. Scott's journey is a real event, yet every future society interprets it through its own fears and needs. Some see the Traveler as a promise, others as a mystery, and still others as a figure whose arrival may signal enormous change.

Scott cannot control those interpretations. Like any historical figure, he must confront the difference between the life he actually lived and the story later generations choose to tell about him.

More Heart Than Hardware

Readers should not expect a technical manual explaining every mechanism behind Scott's travels. Eckert uses scientific ideas to create the problem, but his greater interests are emotional and philosophical. What does prolonged absence do to love? Can a father remain a father after missing most of his son's life? Can personal identity survive when history turns a human being into a myth? If everything familiar eventually disappears, what remains worth carrying into the future?

The novel's answer lies less in physics than in human connection. Scott's voyage matters because Lyle matters to him. The future may offer wonders beyond imagination, but Scott's deepest longing remains intensely personal: He wants to find his son and understand the man Lyle became.

An Impressive and Moving Debut

The Traveler is both an ambitious time-travel adventure and a moving story about a father and son separated by forces neither can control. Its scale expands from a Wisconsin morning to futures beyond ordinary comprehension, but Eckert never loses sight of the relationship at its center.

Scott's dangerous voyage supplies the suspense. The Word provides the novel's meditation on faith, memory, and myth. Lyle gives the story its heart.

Without revealing how their journey develops or where it ultimately leads, I can say that Scott's rediscovery of his son is far more important than any scientific explanation for his travels. *The Traveler* asks us to imagine losing almost everything to the passage of time and then shows us the one bond capable of enduring it.

This is thoughtful, exciting, and deeply affecting science fiction. I found it at my public library, but it is a book worth owning—and one I expect to remember for a long time.

Buy *The Traveler* [on Amazon](#).