**Cyber Girl**

Luke took Elanor’s hand and the world around them swirled. He led her forward into a tunnel of kaleidoscopic light and she felt a shield spell activating around her, his doing, though she could do the same. A moment later the patterns cleared and they walked into what looked like an underground stone dungeon, well lit in the centre by electric lights but dingy around the edges.

Elanor took a few moments to take stock of her surroundings, sure that Luke would deal with anything untoward. There was some large machine in the middle of the floor, humming, surrounded by bright lights. Beside the machine stood a figure in what looked like a partial suit of armour, and then Elanor noticed a girl lying in the centre of the machine. She almost gasped when she saw that the top of the girl’s skull had been removed and the machine was doing something to the girl’s exposed brain.

“Reverse the process.” Luke ordered the machine. At this point the armoured figure moved, grabbing Luke by the throat and lifting him from the ground. Elanor had pulled an ornamental chopstick from her hair and brandished it like a weapon. She didn’t need props like this, but it made her use of power easier. Luke cautioned “Stay back Elanor, this will only take a moment.”

“Do not interfere!” the armoured figure ordered. The voice was human sounding, but flat. “You will be switched off!” The arm holding Luke seemed to tremble, and some sort of energy sparked around Luke.

At this moment the dungeon door burst open and five people entered brandishing guns. “Put down your weapons.” Luke ordered, still dangling from the figure’s hands. Four of the five - two women and two men - obeyed. That one did not was ominous. Behind Luke the machine was replacing the girl’s skull.

The glow about Luke died. “Put me down, then stand quietly and obey me.” The armoured figure did so. “Go and stand beside Elanor.” The figure turned toward her and Elanor noticed the breast plate sculpted with breasts. The face was disfigured by equipment attached where the right eye should have been, but otherwise was that of a dark skinned female. Elanor suppressed a shudder.

One of the men at the door cried out “Lucy!” in an agonised voice and started forward. The others restrained him.

The leader pointed his gun directly at Luke. “Who are you? What are you doing? How did you get here?” The accent was English, but odd, with some foreign intonations. He was over six feet tall, mid thirties, with brown hair and ruggedly handsome. He was wearing a military greatcoat with captain’s pips.

“Put down your weapons and we can talk.” Luke responded reasonably.

“No! That thing is deadly.” the leader responded. “It must be destroyed.”

“That thing is my wife!” the second man cried. “Don’t listen to him! We have to find a way to save her!” That last was a tearful plea.

“Crap! We kill it!” the leader replied. “It’s too dangerous to live.”

“Very well, you leave me no choice.” Luke replied. “We will talk in a minute.” Behind him the restraints opened, releasing a rather befuddled girl. There was a nasty gash across her forehead and a trickle of blood from her nose. Luke turned to assist her.

The figures at the door cried out in surprise as their weapons crumbled to dust in their hands. “How did you do that? And who the hell are you?!” the leader called.

“Management sent me - I’m a trouble shooter.” Luke called over his shoulder. He took the girl’s hand and helped her to her feet. A moment later her form shimmered and then solidified with no trace of her injuries.

“Where am I? What happened?” the girl asked.

“That’s Sally the pizza girl!” one of the women at the door called.

“You tripped over and bumped your head.” Luke said to the girl. “How do you feel?”

“Fine, it doesn’t hurt. But I don’t remember coming down here.”

“Yes, that can happen. See how you feel tomorrow, you may need to see a doctor. Now, one of you pay her for her pizzas and double it for her trouble. And escort her out so she doesn’t trip over anything else.”

The others all looked to their leader. Luke motioned to Elanor to stay put, then began walking the girl towards the group at the door. Elanor took her cue and tapped the chopstick against her left hand, activating the lines of power that glowed with silver light across her body like silver tattoos. The leader’s face showed he had noticed her display.

Her view of the room changed - there were lines of light running everywhere, every living thing was surrounded by an aura of luminous swirling energy, and she could see the lines Luke was using to control Lucy. Luke’s aura was strange but that was normal for him. The people by the door were normal with the exception of the leader. His had whorls and lines radiating from it like a star. Was that anger? And Lucy standing quiescent beside her possessed an aura that was partly human and part complex electronic device.

In addition there were several non corporeal beings floating. There were two that looked like fluted Grecian columns stretching from floor to ceiling, one white and the other black - Luke’s mysterious guides, something that looked like an orange red spiny ball about two meters in diameter, a brilliant blue flame flickering near the door, and an amber barrel hovering by the machine. Elanor had learned to ignore most of these - they couldn’t interact with the physical world, they mostly did nothing but observe, though the two guides could offer advice to those who could see them.

“Chuck, you can escort Sally out.” The leader ordered.

“No! Lucy’s my wife, I’m staying. And it’s Charles, not Chuck!” Elanor finally noticed that the others all spoke with familiar English accents. The leader was the only foreigner.

The leader looked annoyed, but before he could respond, one of the women volunteered “I’ll escort her. But you have to pay her Matt.”

The leader nodded. “All right. Sally, how much for the pizzas? Twenty pounds?” The girl nodded. He pulled a handful of notes from his pocket, counted some off. “Here’s sixty. Keep the change. But next time don’t go wandering around, stay at the front counter until someone comes. Okay?”

Sally nodded, took the money, and then followed the woman through the door. Luke spoke “Now before I take any further action, I want to hear your explanations.”

“I want to hear your explanation first!” the leader exclaimed. “This is my home. I want to know who you are, how you got in, and what you are doing here with that cyborg. And don’t give me crap about management.”

“Ah, what is truth? I am Luke, this is Elanor. We walked in, and we are here to save lives, quite possibly your own.”

“That explains nothing!” Matt exclaimed. “You’re obviously some kind of aliens, you think you can just drop in on the natives and do as you please.”

“And are you human Matt? Introduce yourselves, give me your explanations, then I will give you ours. After that we can decide the best way to sort things out.” Luke turned and began walking back to Elanor. He beckoned those by the door. “Come closer. We won’t bite you. It saves having to raise our voices.” The others looked at their leader, who shrugged and walked toward Luke and Elanor, stopping about two meters away.

The leader spoke. “I’m Captain Matt, this is Chuck, or Charles as he prefers to be known.” Charles was fair haired in a Scandinavian fashion. “This is George.” A dark haired Greek looking man. “This is Hitomi.” A small Japanese looking woman. “And the one who left is Cath, or Catherine. We’re from an organisation called Beowulf.”

“Is there another one called Grendl?” Luke asked. Seeing blank looks he added “The monster that Beowulf was hunting.”

“No, we exist outside the government, outside the U.N.” Matt replied. “We collect alien artifacts and prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. We also try to keep track of aliens on the planet, and stop them being a nuisance.”

“I see, this is the reality behind Men In Black? And this machine is one of the alien artifacts you have collected?”

“Not this. I didn’t even know it was here. You’ll have to ask Chuck about it.”

“I will, but first I want to hear what you know about this, and why you want her destroyed.” Luke waved his arms at the cyborg and the machinery.

Matt gave an angry snort. “There is an alien race of cyborgs. They assimilate all intelligent life, I mean they attach cybernetic stuff to the host body, and control it. Once it’s enslaved, there is no escape, they destroy parts of the brain they do not want. Machines like that do the work, and that thing is one that’s been assimilated. They are almost impossible to kill, they can generate a force shield that blocks bullets, explosions and so on, they don’t need to eat or drink, they are many times stronger than humans. With that one machine that thing can enslave everyone on the planet.”

“Ah, yes, I know this.” Luke nodded. At this point Catherine returned and joined the group. “Put that weapon down, or it will become dust.” Luke ordered. The girl looked at Matt, who shrugged. She reached into her jacket and then placed some kind of sci-fi weapon on the floor.

“And this must be an alien weapon.” Luke commented. The weapon disappeared from the floor and appeared in his hand without crossing the intervening space. Elanor noticed him exchange information with the white pillar. “Hmm, this is a nasty piece of work. It disrupts molecular bonding forces, anything it strikes will explode or crumble to dust. You don’t need it.” He tossed it into the machine behind him.

Then he looked at the leader. “Captain Matt? Sir Matthias Loxton perhaps?”

“No, Matthew Lark.” Elanor could see he was lying by the discolouration of his aura.

“Really? Hmm. If I remember rightly, Beowulf was set up by queen Elizabeth the First, after her court astronomer Doctor John Dee summoned what was believed to be a demon. Dee fell from favour after that, and was lucky not to be executed. Sir Matthias Loxton worked with a Greek Egyptian called Apollo Lukeios to get rid of it. Beowulf was established to deal with unexplained phenomena, with Loxton as its head. He went by the odd pseudonym of Knight of Shadows.” To Elanor, knowing that Luke had once called himself Apollo Lukeios, this meant Luke had been there, and knew a lot more about Beowulf than he had said. Could it mean that Luke recognised Matt as sir Matthias Loxton?

“Skip the history lesson, tell me what you’re doing here.”

“I’m getting to that Hawk. There was a Captain Matthew Lark in the Royal Flying Corps, who disappeared over France in 1917. And another Captain Matthew Lark in the Royal Air Force who disappeared in 1941. And now we have Captain Matthew Lark as the Knight of Shadows. Don’t you think that interesting?”

“No! I want to know why you’re here.”

“Ah, I see. I am Apollo Lukeios. I am in the process of cleaning up yet another mess left by stupid humans. That girl Sally was in this machine when I entered, she was in the process of being assimilated.”

“And you let her go! We have to find her!”

The dungeon door slammed shut of its own accord. “No, I reversed the process and healed the damage the machine had done. She is fine, but she won’t remember being here.”

Matt nodded, and seemed to be relaxing. Charles blurted out “Then you can save Lucy!”

“That may be possible. But first tell me what you know. How did she get like that, how did she and the machine get here? Are there any more?”

“I think that’s the only one.” Charles began. His eyes stared off into the distance. “Lucy and I were married last year. We both work for Beowulf. Two months ago some sort of capsule fell to earth, crashing in central Asia, and Lucy was in the team investigating it. They found one cyborg and some equipment. The cyborg attacked them, killing one and assimilating the others with the machine.”

“That was Beowulf two.” Captain Matt commented. “Wiped out.”

“Lucy was the last one alive, she called for backup.”

“That was Beowulf four. Wiped out also.”

“I was in that team.”

“I didn’t know.” Matt seemed genuinely surprised.

“I took along one of the alien grenade launchers and a force shield.”

Matt nodded “I know the ones you mean.”

“When we got there, the cyborgs captured everyone except me. That’s when they captured Lucy. They assimilated them one by one.” Charles was shaking now. “I launched a grenade, and activated the shield. It destroyed everything outside the ship except for me.”

“Everything for half a mile was nothing but dust. The ship was destroyed.” Matt commented. “We had to claim some terrorists had tried to build a nuclear bomb. The Russians supported us, so did the Americans. The Chinese didn’t but they went along with it publicly to save face. The explosion was in Chinese territory.”

“No the ship was intact.” Charles continued. “I went in and there was one cyborg in the ship, but it seemed de-activated. I found Lucy inside that machine!” Charles’ voice broke, and tears began to stream down his face. “I pulled her out, but she could barely stand. She told me she needed the machine to stay alive, so I used the antigrav platform to lift the machine out of the ship. Lucy told me what to take, and I took things, loaded it all onto the platform. I put Lucy on the platform, got on myself, and then launched two more grenades through the open airlock door into the ship. That destroyed the ship. Then I brought her here, set up the machine, and I’ve been trying to find a way to help her ever since. But she always told me she was too weak to stand. I believed her. I don’t know what happened. Can you help her?”

“She is programmed to assimilate other intelligent life. But she loved you, and that spared you, plus she knew she needed you to repair the machine and find raw materials. She may have faked her weakness, or it may have been genuine, and she only managed to repair something today.” Luke suggested.

Charles nodded. “Today I did something that allowed her to breathe by herself. You can you help her, can’t you?”

“You destroyed the ship and everything inside, except for what you brought here?”

“Yes.”

“Firstly, this machine must be destroyed. Elanor, if you please.”

Elanor smiled “Watch!” She flicked her chopstick at the machine, activating some lines of power as she did. The machine, lights and everything crumbled to dust, becoming a pile of fine powder on the floor. There were exclamations of surprise from the others.

“You’ve ruined it!” Charles exclaimed. “How can you heal her now?”

“Leave it Chuck.” Matt said tiredly. “I think he knows what he is doing.”

“How do you know that?”

Captain Matt replied slowly as if he were thinking carefully about what to say. “I am the current head of Beowulf. Luke has used enough coded phrases that only he and I know to convince me he is who he says.” Charles looked angry, the others stared at Matt speculatively.

“Now we will heal Lucy. Elanor, please stand on the other side.” Elanor moved to stand by Lucy’s right hand side. “What can you tell me about Lucy? What do you notice?”

“Well, for a start she’s had a lot of work done - prosthetics, electronics.” Elanor replied. “Her luminous energy matrix is only partly human; some of it I recognise as complex electronics, some of it I don’t recognise.”

“Yes, a cyborg.” Luke replied. “There is nothing intrinsically wrong about cyborgs in general, any human with electronic prostheses could be classified as a cyborg.” He walked about the girl pointing things out.

“The legs may be encased in armor, but from her aura they have been replaced around the knees with prosthetics. I think the legs above the knees are enhanced - bones and muscles replaced with something stronger, skin toughened. The internal organs in the torso have all been removed - lungs, heart, kidneys, stomach and intestines. She doesn’t need to eat or drink or even breathe. There is some sort of power plant in there that could power her for two hundred thousand years. By human standards she’s practically immortal.”

“But I wouldn’t want to live like that.” George interjected.

“That’s a matter of personal taste.” Luke replied. “Many people with disabilities would give their eye teeth for prostheses like these. And many others would sell their souls to live that long.” He turned back to the cyborg. “Something similar has been done with her arms, shoulders and spine. There are weapons built into the arms, and one mounted on the head. Lucy, how strong are you?”

“Properly braced I can lift 3,200kg with one arm.” the cyborg spoke in a flat monotone. “My legs can support about 9,000kg, but my spine can only support 5,400kg without bracing.”

“Luke, how are you controlling her?” Matt asked.

“When Charles destroyed the ship he also destroyed the master controller.” Luke began.

Lucy continued “I am operating in autonomous mode. I must find safety and then find intelligent life to assimilate.”

“There you have its danger in a nutshell.” Matt commented. “It will never stop trying to assimilate others. But how are you controlling it?”

“Just one of my abilities.” Luke shrugged. “I am over-riding the controller she has wired into her brain. That is what the machine was doing with Sally - the first requirement is to re-wire and hijack the brain. Any additional enhancements are dependent on needs.”

Luke walked behind Lucy. “This is not a helmet - they have removed most of her skull, and this stuff has replaced her right eye.” He indicated the camera like device attached where her eye should have been.

“If you x-rayed her brain you would find it full of semi-organic wiring and electronic circuits.” Matt offered. “You’d need a machine like the one you destroyed to remove it, but how do you replace all the organs and flesh?”

“You know it can be done Matt, but you used ti call it sorcery. Elanor, you see those swirls just here?” Luke ran his hands through Lucy’s aura behind her head. “That’s the controller, buried in the base of the brain. If that is removed she dies because the machinery will stop. The body must be replaced at the same time. The energy matrix remembers the body, but we must be careful because it is contaminated with the cybernetics. However, the physical is a projection of the soul, so we can recover what she has lost.”

Luke spun around, looking into the air. “Ah, we have an audience. For those of you who cannot see, there are several hundred spirits, or non-corporeal visitors, crowding around us. They have come to watch something unusual.”

Luke shrugged his shoulders, stretched his arms and waggled them like wings, and then rubbed his hands together. He spread them apart like a magician to show a silver ball about the size of an orange on the palm of his right hand. He flicked it at Lucy, where it struck her chest and disappeared inside. A moment later her eyes widened in surprise, and her mouth opened as if to voice a scream. Her body began to scintillate with points of silver light, and as each point faded so did her body, until after about twenty seconds it had completely vanished.

Elanor watched with her sorcerous sight, not sure what the others would see. Lucy had become a large ball of swirling luminous energy, a mixture of pink, brown and dark metallic grey. Lines of light stretched from the ball to Luke, who now appeared like a huge luminous cloud stretching off into infinity, growing larger the further away it stretched. Elanor turned her attention back to the ball of light, which seemed to be separating into pink on one side and dark metallic grey on the other. Then, like a single celled organism, it began to divide into two, one half pink, the other metallic grey. Within a few seconds there were two balls of light side by side. A cloudy protuberance stretched out from the nebula that was Luke, and absorbed the ball of metallic grey.

A moment later the pink ball became tangled in a mesh of lines of light, and then began to scintillate with silver sparks. As each spark faded it left behind a dot of brown, and slowly the form of a naked brown skinned woman solidified. Luke returned to his human form and studied the female form for a moment, and then with a wave of his hand clothed it in a lime green jumpsuit. He produced another ball of silver flame and flicked that at the girl’s chest, where it disappeared.

Lucy’s eyes flew open and she looked around wildly. “Charlie!” she cried, and then stumbled back. She would have fallen if Elanor hadn’t caught her. Luke touched both hands to her head and she calmed. “Where am I? What’s happened? I was in a battle, I think. And I’ve had the strangest dreams.”

“I think you’ll be fine. We’ll explain it all in a few minutes.” Luke soothed her. “Charles?”

Matt nodded at Lucy. “Go to her.”

Charles rushed to hug Lucy, his face wet with tears. She hugged back with a slightly bemused expression.

Matt shepherded them out of the dungeon and into a common room upstairs. Luke produced a rather good bottle of whisky out of thin air, Elanor was proud of the cold beers and hot pizzas she produced with a wave of her chopstick. Hitomi worked a more normal magic to produce a large pot of tea along with cups and plates.

Explanations took a while. Lucy seemed well but did not recall much after her capture, and what she could recall was like a dream that faded in the light of day. Lucy declared that she wanted her job back, Matt agreed she could have it.

At some point Catherine asked “So Luke and Elanor, what planet are you from?”

“Earth.” Elanor replied with amusement. “I was born in Kenya and grew up in London. Why do you think we’re aliens? Is my aura different or something?” It took her a moment to realise why Catherine gave her a strange look.

“Oh. It’s just you have really strange powers, and Luke says he’s been around since Elizabethan times.”

“I’m human, Luke taught me how to work energy. Most people who don’t know call it sorcery.” She looked at Luke, who was looking at Captain Matt. “I can heal, but I don’t think I could manage what Luke did today.”

Matt smiled “‘Any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic.’ Isaac Azimov. Luke, what can you tell us ordinary mortals about yourself?” So he doesn’t want Luke to say anything about Matt, Elanor thought.

“Ah, Hawk, I wouldn’t call you an ordinary mortal, you wouldn’t be head of Beowulf if you were. But you all want to know about me. I said I was a trouble shooter from management. That is close enough to the truth. You may have heard of the Gardeners of Earth, or the Watchers, or perhaps the Old Sorcerers. I am one of them. I am not an alien in the sense you mean, but neither am I human in the sense you normally mean. To the ancient Greeks I was Apollo Lukeios, to the ancient Egyptians I was Horus the Dawn Hawk. I am one of those who have shepherded humans down through the ages. Some have called me a god, some have called me demon. I am neither.”

George downed his beer. “So you’re like us - except you live a long time, and you can do magic. And the ancients called you a god.”

“Something like that. Once you learn to control energies you can stay young.”

“So how old are you?” Catherine asked. “Both of you.”

“Elanor is only young - mid sixties, not more.”

“You look about thirty!” Catherine exclaimed.

“Hah! I have grand kids. I was fifty when I met Luke.”

“I stopped counting a long time ago.” Luke commented. “I predate the pyramids and Stone Henge.”

“So why to you call yourself Luke these days?” Matt asked.

“Well, Horus is a bit pretentious, as is Apollo. Have you worked out the link?” He looked at the others as he said this.

“Not really. From Lukeios perhaps?”

“Partly.” Luke smiled. “Lukeios in ancient Greek means both wolf like, and brightly shining. It was one of the names for the planet Venus when it was in the morning sky. So was Horus the Dawn Hawk.”

“Venus as the morning star? Interesting.” Matt replied. He tilted his head onto one side and looked quizzically at Luke. “Would Luke be from the Latin name for the morning star?”

Luke beamed a huge smile. “Anyone else worked that out? No? Very well - to the ancient Romans I was Venus Lucifer - Light bearing morning star. In other words, I am Lucifer Morningstar, and I think you have all heard of me.”

George let out a whistle.

“Now I see why you called yourself Apollo Lukeios in Elizabethan times.” Matt commented. “Lucifer had a lot of bad press.”

Luke nodded. “Yes, part of a conspiracy by some early Christians to condemn everything pagan, and partly due to the errors of translation that were surfacing after the renaissance.”

“Are you a demon?” Lucy asked.

“No, I am like a shepherd or more accurately a goatherd, since humans are much more like goats - recalcitrant, stubborn and inquisitive.” Luke smiled. “As you have seen, I have powers, and the ancients called me a god.”

“So there are others like you around?” Catherine asked. “I mean, all those Egyptian and Greek gods - they were people like you?”

“Some. Many more were troublemakers, charlatans, or figments of people’s imaginations. Most of them have moved on, a few have died. I’m one of the few who stayed around. But I’m not always here, there are parallel worlds that I visit. This earth is just one of many.”

“How?” Matt’s eyes narrowed.

“There are an infinity of parallel worlds, most of them quite strange to be honest. I concentrate on the human realm.”

“Erm, I meant how can you travel between them?”

“With training and power it can be done at will. And there are places where the walls are thinner than others, and it is easier to cross. You have your legends of fairies and the like - they are some who can cross between the shadows. The same goes for a number of your aliens - they have simply crossed from a parallel earth.” Luke was hiding much more than he was revealing, Elanor thought. He waved his hands. “But enough of me. Matt, if you need me, you know how to call me.”

Matt looked thoughtful. “Yes, but I presumed you had died long ago, or returned to some other planet. Can you save other cyborgs if we find them?”

“I do not kill, and I do not carry weapons. If you find your preferred solution is to kill or destroy, ask my opinion. I will save what I can.”

The talk continued for a time, before Matt yawned and announced. “Past my bedtime. Go home everybody. Lucy, when you feel up to it, come in and we’ll do the paperwork to get your job back. But rest and spend some time with Charlie. Chuck, maybe you should take the rest of this week off.”

They said their goodbyes and left, leaving Matt alone with Luke and Elanor. “Matt, they suspect you are not human. You make comments about the universe as if you’ve been out there. They are not stupid.”

“They will work it out eventually. But I don’t want to go around making statements like you do. They have to work it out bit by bit, and only if they are observant. You realise I didn’t recognise you? You’ve changed.”

“A different face and name is necessary from time to time. You’ve been Matthew Lark for too long. Unless you are happy to flit from place to place like I do, you have to blend in.”

“It’s a lot harder these days. They have electronic records you know.”

“I know. I have special abilities, but you can plan for new identities every fifty years or so, and fabricate a new person. I am always a foreigner because it is harder for them to verify details. Still, it is your choice. Just don’t complain if they one day run you out of town or put you in a freak show.”

“I won’t. But what better cover than head of the organisation that handles unexplained phenomena? People leave, or die, and to the governments I am just a coded name. These people won’t shop me if they think I’m an alien.”

“Are you an alien?” Elanor asked. “Where and when were you born?”

“Are you an alien?” Matt countered. “With all those glowing lines that appeared on your body, and the powers you demonstrated, there has to be a case.”

“My aura is human, or so Luke tells me. Yours is not human, neither is his. It’s a dead giveaway.” Elanor replied candidly.

Matt laughed. “The one thing I can’t hide. I can change my face, but not my aura. Lucky that most people cannot see auras. I was born far away, I arrived on earth by accident long ago. I was following an alien ship carrying robot soldiers. Not like Lucy became, something quite different. I am not sure what happened, I think they killed me, and their hospital ship resurrected me in human form. My ship was destroyed, and theirs had vanished. I’ve mostly been stuck on earth ever since. I have occasionally gone for a ride with visiting aliens, but I always return here. I like it here, I’ve grown used to it.”

“Hawk, you’ve spent too much time amongst humans, you are losing your connection to the spirit. And you have become wedded to Beowulf. If you change your name and face you’d have to let it go.”

“Why do you keep calling him Hawk?” Elanor interrupted.

“No mystery!” Matt exclaimed. “My original name is Shadow Hawk, and my title was Knight of Shadows, and he has called me that ever since I told him. It has nothing to do with the name of the head of the organisation.”

“What I was going to say was you would have killed Lucy. There was no need.”

Matt looked thoughtful. “I couldn’t see any other way. I guess I could have reprogrammed the machine to reverse the controller, but without that she would die unless her flesh is replaced at the same time. How can I replace the living flesh after the machines have cut them off?”

“What would happen if you had gone into the machine?” Luke looked into Matt’s eyes. “Answer that and you know.”

“That hospital ship? I’ve survived things that should have killed me, and healed within minutes. So if I had been assimilated, you are saying I would heal and revert within minutes?”

“Yes. And if you had placed your hands on Lucy, held them there for a few minutes, you would have healed her. Your gift is to heal, and you can use it wisely on others. Think about it.”

A little later Luke decided it was time he and Elanor left. They said their goodbyes, Matt kissed Elanor on the cheek, and then Luke said “If you need my help or advice, you know how to contact me. Even if you just want to get away from it all for a while. We could go for a walk through shadow and visit parallel worlds. Oh, one more thing, you may encounter a few other humans with powers similar to Elanor’s. Most will be friends of mine. Do try not to upset them.”

“If I do encounter them I might ask you to vouch for them.”

They left the same way they arrived. There was a swirl of rainbow colour and they were back home in Luke’s chateau in the south of France. Luke turned to Elanor “Don’t believe what he said about the hospital ship - he has convinced himself it is true. He comes from the primal shadow, the one that gives rise to all the other parallel worlds - you would have recognised that by his aura, but he has forgotten much, and taught himself to be an alien, and now he is teaching himself to be human.”

Elanor was puzzled and said so.

“He thinks his true name is something like Hawk that soars in the Shadows. An unusual name, I’ve not found any reference to a name like that in the prime shadow. He had an accident a long time ago that gave him complete amnesia. He does not remember his life in the primal shadow, he does not even believe in shadows or parallel worlds. That tells me it was a misuse of power, most likely enemy action, that caused his memory loss. He encountered a space faring people, likely he awoke in their shadow with no memory, and traveled around the galaxy for a long time. His ship crashed on earth somewhere near Wales I think. Most of the alien equipment in his home is from his ship, the rest is from the robot ship he shot down. This much he told when we were friends in Elizabethan times. He invented a story about a robot hospital ship that reconstructed him to explain why he can shape shift and why he cannot be killed by mortal weapons, and perhaps even explain his missing memory. He learned to be an alien while he lived among them. He has lived on earth for a while, and is learning to be human. In that process he is losing his heritage. It is sad to see that.”

“Is there anything you can do to help?”

Luke shrugged “A little. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink. He has to use his powers, or walk the mandala of order and chaos in the primal shadow to restore his memory and regain his heritage. I can remind him from time to time, and at least I have an excuse spend time with him again. One day if we go for a walk in shadow I will lead him to the mandala, but I cannot make him walk it. I will not bring him there until he is ready. We have plenty of time.”