



# **The Wizard From Vahan**

## **By Candy Ray**

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Originally self-published by Frond

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## Table Of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter12](#)

[Other eBooks By Candy Ray](#)

## Introduction

The Wizard From Vahan was my first novella which I wrote in 2015, initially published by Night Horse/Lulu and now newly returned to me. It is a little different from my other books, a science fiction/fantasy romp, influenced by TV and Sci-Fi feature films. The theme is the role of adept magicians and junior magicians in society, and because it was chaos magic that got me writing in the first place, these characters are of course chaos magicians.

If you loved my other books I hope you will enjoy this one, and if in doubt don't take it too seriously!

April 2019

# Chapter 1

Jasper's time jump took him to a strange planet with a red sky, where he was strapping on armour. That wasn't what he wanted. He was not on the warrior path; he was a mystic, and the time jump was part of his esoteric training. Jasper was twenty years old and still only in the first year of his studies, but already he was bending time.

He paused in pulling on the metallic sleeve with its lining of netting and tried to change from a war theme to a ring of cosy village huts around a thriving market. That was his ideal, but he couldn't manage to dream an alternative reality, so the armour scenario continued, with the addition now of a page solemnly holding out a sword to him on a cushion. As the blade caught the light this was obviously supposed to be a thrilling moment, but he wasn't thrilled and sought again for a means of escape. There was none; he found himself in a large field in front of a castle, the field bordered by a row of miniature hedges, and a crowd was assembled watching him expectantly.

The page's lips parted, and he whispered something reverent although too soft to be heard, and Jasper wished intently that he could find something other than the sword to seize upon: a magic wand, perhaps, with a sparkling crystal at the top? Or a scroll with inspirational writings inscribed on it in fine inks? But the crowd was waiting, so he finally lifted the sword in the air and cried, "I pledge to bring peace and creative art to this kingdom, not war." He appeared to be speaking in his native language.

A cheer erupted, and that at least was welcome as golden beams slanted down mixing with the red in the sky and glinted off the sword once again.

More armed men came forward from the side of the castle, and began to march. Jasper found himself marching at the head of them, and he only knew which way to go because a scout on horseback indicated with an exaggerated gesture and called out, "this way!"

He was seriously thinking about doing a second time jump but his superiors in the Void Star Lodge had advised him to leave at least a week between them, and they had also said that it was fine for the journey to be all in his head in meditation or a dream, as it usually manifested. Except that this wasn't; it was completely physical and real. A distant memory nudged at his mind of a film about time travel he had seen in his childhood, in which the protagonist once came to and found himself naked on a battlefield. As they marched along he saw a faint blue vortex

etched on the sky and wondered if it belonged to another time jumper who was also going to find this too real for their taste. If so, maybe they could get acquainted. Maybe it was a beautiful girl?

His reverie was interrupted by the scout calling out, "Turn left!" He changed direction, and as the others followed him the countryside changed too and became more rugged, although there were still some green plants. All the vegetation was quite different from what he was familiar with on Earth. On one side they had passed by many enormous brown fronds waving and towering above them. Near the ground were thick, silky blades like large reeds and various unknown flowering bushes.

After a few hours' marching they reached a sheltered gully where they stopped, and a number of the men began to set up camp. As Jasper seemed to be their leader he knew there was no need to help them, which at least spared him the indignity of the others finding out that he knew nothing of how to do it. He sat down on the ground which was a mixture of small rocks and the reed-like blades of grass, and began to review his position seriously.

No doubt he would soon be expected to fight, that being the purpose of the sword and armour, and the only form of combat he had ever learned was a martial art intended primarily for spiritual training, known as Combat Unlock. It was Void Star's own, and despite their belonging to the Chaos Magic tradition it was based on the same principles as its predecessors in the old world such as Kung Fu and Tai Chi. Defence was preferable to attack, and the main aim of the training was to strengthen and purify all the vehicles: body, mind and soul. In this year of 2091 Chaos Magic had become the dominant branch of the esoteric and was respected, unlike its beginnings in the twentieth century when it was a fringe interest of a rebellious minority.

Jasper didn't want to be branded a coward, but there was no way he could possibly enter on this form of warfare using swords and shields without any experience and avoid either being killed or wounded or discovered to be an imposter; maybe all three of these would happen one after the other. It was imperative to find a way of exiting the situation. He wondered what had happened to the real knight he was supposed to be. Had they somehow switched bodies, or was the original knight imprisoned somewhere either in flesh or in spirit?

The page appeared with food and drink for him on a wooden tray: some kind of noodle concoction with pieces of meat and sauce, and the drink looked spiced but not alcoholic. Of course it would be unwise to get drunk while on a campaign. The page had obviously been eating before he served food to his master, because a

noodle still lingered around his cheek. He was very young and fair-skinned; his clothes were of a material like velvet and a little puffy, and he regarded Jasper with large, nervous blue eyes as he handed him his dinner. Jasper realized he had no idea of the etiquette any more than he knew who the page was. He felt like patting him on the head but did not know what reaction that would cause, so he simply said, "thank you", took the food and began to eat. It tasted very good.

The sun was lower now as the men walked about camp and posted guards by strong fences at the perimeter. Most of them wore armour the same as Jasper's while a few were in more civilian clothes made of generally medieval-looking materials mainly in green and brown. Their colouring and features looked eastern European- maybe they were, and this was somehow Earth on another dimension, despite the red sky and strange plants.

It looked like Jasper had a few hours to plan his next move before it was a matter of marching out to fight some foe, or alternatively settling down for the night, probably to fight tomorrow. His eyes searched the sky for the blue vortex as all he could think of was to pin his hopes on that.

At last he saw the tell-tale smudge over towards the western horizon. Did he need an excuse to walk over that way? He knew that if he attracted too much attention leaving the camp the company would be saddling a horse for him, and maybe providing an escort. Stealth was of the utmost importance.

He stood up and began to move casually towards the perimeter, feeling conspicuous in his armour and marching boots. Everyone was still busy, so he quickened his pace a little and headed for a gap that had been left in the fence. From the materials that were stacked beside it he could tell that a gate was shortly to be fixed there.

Still no-one looked at him as he slipped out which was a relief, but the anxiety soon hit again as he walked, making sure not to look behind him. As he closed the gap between the camp and the formation in the sky the vortex became more defined, with ridges at the edge like a rubber tyre and flecks of something unknown floating towards the centre. The nearer he came to it the more he wondered why it hadn't attracted the attention of the other men. But it appeared they had been trained to keep looking straight ahead while they marched. It must be only because he was the leader that he had been able to get away with looking all around him at the unfamiliar scenery and from time to time also glancing up at the sky. Their leader- what a joke that was. He didn't know their names or anything about them.

As he drew level with the ruffled clouds a being appeared in the sky and descended on some kind of conical shaped parachute. It had a body a bit like a platypus with a smooth, floppy torso and limbs and a duck-like face. It spoke.

“Go back! Why are you running away from your mission?”

That smart from earlier came back. “Look, whoever you are, I’m not a coward!” he snapped. “I’m well-trained in martial arts combat. But I can’t sword fight, I haven’t learned how to, and I don’t even know who I’m supposed to be or how to use any of his stuff. It’s unreasonable!”

A frown crossed the bird-like face. “Something must have gone wrong, then. You should be him through and through. You should know everything he knows, and you shouldn’t remember me.”

“I DON’T remember you. But whatever’s going on let’s stop being stupid, go back to the beginning and start again.” Jasper was furious at himself at how much he dreaded going into sword fights with no preparation, yet he knew he was in the right in this argument. You shouldn’t just throw your life away.

After what seemed an endless pause the strange creature waved its flipper in a gesture that looked more like throwing a ball than beckoning and said shortly, “you’ll have to come up here and we’ll move you. But I’ll make sure your people see you rise up, so they think their hero has gone to a meeting in Heaven and will be coming back to them later.”

“How?” Jasper asked, pointedly not showing any emotion at having been saved from certain death.

“Just put your arms out in front of you and jump slightly.”

It was as if a laser beam caught him as he jumped and lifted him into the sky, although he saw nothing but the castellated walls of the round vortex, huge now and arched over him in a tunnel formation.

He expected his destination to be some kind of holding station, neither the place he had been living before he jumped nor the abode of this alien who had so casually said, “We’ll move you.” As it turned out, the place where he emerged after being sucked backwards along the tunnel was a leafy clearing in what appeared to be an area of light jungle.

He was still wearing the armour, but the sword had gone- where? Back to some maiden at the bottom of a lake? That summed up his feelings about the sword; it seemed to be the focal point of whatever magic was happening in the world he had just left. Soon he found a linen tunic lying on the grass which had obviously been provided for him, although it could hardly be called proper clothes, and he began slowly to take off the armour.



Half an hour later he was wearing the tunic and exploring the jungle for basic means of survival. Small trees were growing everywhere, and he gripped their trunks and pulled himself through the spongy ground. So far he hadn't seen any inhabitants, not even any animals. He soon discovered a kind of sweet pink fruit growing on bushes near the ground which could be both eaten and drunk. They had a webby flesh and abundant thin, watery juice. After finding these he began to relax a little, though he was still wading through sludge with no idea where he was going.

## Chapter 2

The magician looked into his black scrying mirror. The one thing he would never want to be was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and he freely admitted that the first time he had ever looked in it he saw a demon- the same one which came to him every time and enabled him to see the multiple varied scenes in the depths of the glass and their bustling activity. More than anything else it resembled a television, and the programme today was Jasper.

At first he felt a flicker of annoyance- what was this, an intruder in The Retreat? As he looked more closely the impression was more of someone lost, but either way he was taking no chances and raven's wings began to sprout forth from his shoulders. Jasper's arm went across his face as what appeared to be a great bird swooped down from nowhere and crashed into the jungle a few paces ahead of him.

"What are you doing here? This is my Retreat!"

Jasper peered out through his locked fingers. "So you're a man? I would never have known. It wasn't my idea to come here, and I have no idea where I am. My time jump went wrong, that's all, and then some alien brought me here."

He could see the stranger's face now: rugged high cheekbones and brown eyes, which now held a look of sympathy. He was a little darker skinned than the men Jasper had led on the march, like a suntanned version of them. The raven wings began to shrink until all that was left was a raven-feather cloak swirling around him, and he reached out and clasped Jasper's hand.

"My name's Emin," he said. "I am known to the people as a wizard. I built this place for myself by magic, and it hangs in the air above Vahan; from here I can watch what the inhabitants are doing and intervene if necessary. I can see you didn't mean to intrude, and I'll be glad to get you back to wherever you're supposed to be."

For the first time since his time jump Jasper actually felt optimistic. "Thank you, Emin", he said.

"How did your time jump go wrong- could you explain that some more? I've done them myself when I was training, and I've never known anything to go wrong."

As they walked through the jungle Jasper related everything that had happened to him that day. It was far easier to move now that he was following someone who knew exactly where he was going, and which parts of the vegetation were the easiest to push through. They made good progress, avoiding the denser parts of

the foliage, and soon came to a wooden house in an area that was flat and relatively clear of creepers. Outside the house were some rough wooden seats and a table.

Jasper sat down on one of the seats, for he was very tired by now. Although he was strong and fit from his training he had been on a long march, and then a trek through the jungle pushing plants out of the way, both of them quite unexpected on what was after all supposed to have been an inner dream journey.

Emin went into the house and came out several minutes later with several items on a tray: a pack of tarot cards and a set of rune stones, both exactly the same as the ones Jasper was familiar with on Earth, and a jug full of juice from the pink plant together with two tall glasses. "You sit quietly and have a drink of bitu juice," Emin said. "It wouldn't be good for us to drink it all the time, you need water as well, but it will do for now and I know where to find water later on. While you're drinking I'm going to do some divination, to see if I can find out more about your situation."

Jasper could barely follow what Emin was doing; his fingers flew, and the tarot cards jumped into one formation after another. But Emin frowned and shook his head, and then tried again, this time with the rune stones.

"Something is blocking me from getting any information. I'll have to try remote viewing. I'll go first to the place where you started and then to the blue vortex. Watch that no-one approaches; they shouldn't, we should be the only people here." With that Emin sat cross-legged and closed his eyes, and projected his astral body along a tunnel to view the two places.

Jasper felt like he was about to fall asleep, but he focussed on Emin and concentrated on guarding him; also on seeing the tunnel because he should be able to do that with no trouble. Yet it appeared very dark and clouded to him, and when Emin opened his eyes ten minutes later he reported that there was still a barrier, something like a wall in his way. "I will send my raven", he said.

Jasper smiled. "Charming- just like Noah in his ark, if your people know that story. That planet Vahan below us- it isn't part of Earth, is it?"

"No", said Emin, getting up and going to the table where he poured himself a glass of juice. "It's alongside it. 'A parallel world,' you would say. I come from Vahan, and I care about everything that goes on down there, but parallel places like Earth I never look at. They don't interest me."

Jasper yawned. "Can we have some sleep now and get back to this problem in the morning?"

"Of course," Emin said. "I should have put you straight in the guest room after what's happened to you today. I'll show you where it is."

The inside of the house was a bit like a log cabin or a barn, with many crossed wooden beams, rough-hewn cupboards and alcoves with rugs in them to serve as bedrooms. It was still light in The Retreat and Jasper wondered if it even had day and night, but he managed to make it darker by closing the shutters, and went straight to sleep.

In his dreams he met the raven. It brushed against him, sending an electric jolt through him, and raised one claw like a human being pointing. It spoke in a metallic voice. "I haven't found your knight, because he is not there to find. It is you who must make him." Then it flew away in a rush of beating wings.

Later he woke, not knowing if it was a new morning or still the same permanent day. Outside he found Emin sitting at the table with chunks of the bitu fruit in bowls, and this time a jug of water.

"Don't you have wine or beer?" he asked, smirking.

"I don't take any intoxicants myself", said Emin. "But it isn't because I'm a saint, far from it. I've worked with demons many times. It's just discipline. You'll get it when you're out of your first year."

"Treat to come, then," said Jasper, beginning to eat the fruit. "I saw your raven last night, he said..."

"Not there to find", Emin finished for him. "You must make him."

"Yes, of course." Jasper didn't show any surprise or admiration. That's the way it was in his lodge, equality right from the start between new students and those who were further along the path, and luckily Emin seemed to be on the same page.

"There is a problem with that- have you thought?" Emin continued. His tone was a little anxious, which was unusual for him. "If you have to make the knight yourself, and you haven't enough information to carry out the mission, it could change or completely destroy what you are now."

"I don't see how that follows", said Jasper. "There was no need to do this experiment. It was stupid of that platypus thing to do it. So everything can go back to how it was before."

"Not quite. The raven said more to me than he did to you. I made him after all, so he trusts me. There's a lot more going on than you know about, and you can't get away with doing nothing at all, or doing something else instead."

Jasper kicked the ground moodily. "I'll just have to be BORN as him then, and grow up all over again. Then I'll certainly have his knowledge and his memories. I don't want to waste loads of time like that, but in some ways it would be like being given extra years of my life."

“Being reborn won’t do it either,” said Emin. “But I have a proposal for you, if you would consider it. I can sword-fight. I would even like to be a hero on Vahan, without getting involved in family and property and all the endless political intrigues. If you agree to it I could go and carry out your mission, be your knight and create him. In the meantime you could stay here and be me. There are hardly ever visitors here; most of the time I’m alone. If I could finish what has to be done quickly, you could soon leave and go back to your own time and your own planet.”

“Would you do that for me?” Jasper asked, surprised.

“Yes. It isn’t a favour- I would love to do that, and I would find out what I really want to know, which is why your friend with the beak tried to send YOU to do it.”

“He’s no friend of mine,” muttered Jasper. Suddenly he was thinking about the family he had come from on Earth, and of how it might be some time before he saw them again despite Emin’s good intentions.

“He said you knew him though, and you weren’t supposed to remember him. That’s the part that interests me. I’ll soon break through that and find out all about him and his scheme, and if I don’t like it I’ll stop it. Why should the people of Vahan have to put up with that?”

“There might be a whole race of them to deal with,” Jasper pointed out. “I’m sure he said, ‘WE will move you’.”

“Probably just meant himself and the others on his ship. Anyway, the place they moved you to was the planet’s only satellite- the one I made, so they’re practically asking me to get involved.”

“They seem to see it as some kind of Heaven up in the sky- so you must be God.”

Emin laughed. “I’m not being God deliberately.” He changed the subject, and began briefing Jasper about where to find water, which plants could be eaten and the very few animals which lived on The Retreat. He was evidently aiming to leave very soon, within the next few days, and he took Jasper on a tour to make sure he knew exactly where to find the water and the food plants. He explained that there was plenty of wood near the house and tools for working it, but there would be no need to use it as fuel because The Retreat was always of an even temperature, and just as Jasper had thought it was always daylight. You measure the days and nights by when you feel it is time to sleep.

“Can I use some of your magical tools?” asked Jasper eagerly, with visions of that crystal wand and magic scroll being within his reach at last.

“Well as you know, magical tools are personal,” said Emin. “I shouldn’t think anyone will come here asking for a wizard- if they do just tell them you’re his

apprentice. After all you would be, if you came from Vahan. Carry on with the exercises you've been doing- it won't hurt to do them for longer than you originally planned, in fact it will help."

Jasper was disappointed, but he was hardly in a position to dictate terms, so he turned to the subject of how Emin was going to become the knight in the same way that he had. He was confused by that because the knight had felt like himself, and when he walked away from the battle camp it was the knight who walked away. Emin assured him that he could do it easily by looping the time tunnel so it made a U-turn, and he spent some time describing the process, but Jasper couldn't follow it at all.

He also found it amazing that Emin could go down to Vahan whenever he wanted simply by dematerializing his body and reappearing on the planet surface. "I just make the vibration of every molecule faster and faster", Emin explained, "until my physical body is vibrating as fast as my astral body. All the parts of me that are subtler than that cling to those two bodies, moving through them in a spiral. I fix on the place in Vahan I want to visit and move the whole whirling structure to that place, and then gradually slow down the molecules again. I can go anywhere at any time, and I could come back here to help you if you needed me. But once I start to be the knight it would be best to remain on the planet surface and keep that form stable until the mission is complete."

"How long do you think it will take?" Jasper asked.

"No idea. I'll be as quick as I can, but I really don't have any other place to leave you apart from here, alone."

It was a sobering thought. Jasper had never been completely alone, although he had always been inclined to go off for periods of solitude, usually to practise martial arts moves or to draw and paint. He came from a small semi-rural area in the United States; however he saw himself as a citizen of the Earth as everyone did in 2091. The calling of a magician meant he would have to leave his family and spend long periods training in schools like Void Star, and to prepare himself he always kept a little apart, but he hadn't expected anything like the present situation.

"It will be a great chance to make some progress with your meditation. I can show you some wonderful places here to meditate", Emin said cheerfully. There was obviously nothing devastating for him about the prospect of solitude. A few hours later, during what for them was the evening, they were sitting in deep contemplation on the tangled mat of green plants in a sweeping cove by a waterfall, while insects chirped in the surrounding foliage. It was convenient for fetching water and certainly a tranquil place to meditate, but Jasper would have preferred it to be

full of activity and other students like the gardens at Void Star training school where they used to go for their lessons in various mental techniques.

The following morning Emin tried again to gather information about the situation with the knight and the aliens, this time scrying in his black mirror. The lively little demon in the mirror showed him what looked like a wheel covered in notches, which nestled among aircraft controls. "The aliens are scrambling signals. It's more technology than magic, which hides what they're doing very efficiently."

Emin's eyes glowed fiery. He glanced over at Jasper. "Where's that sword? I'll get the facts by wielding that, and then they can't hide what they're doing to my planet. The people of Vahan are mine: I take care of them, no-one interferes."

"I don't know where the sword is," said Jasper. "It vanished when I came here."

Emin appeared to calm down. He stood up and pulled his raven- feather cloak tight around him. "I know where it will be: with the knight's possessions at the camp. They'll all be there waiting for you to claim them, and I'll make sure the aliens think you have. The story they see in their minds will be that I bucked you up, told you what you needed to know and sent you back out on your military campaign."

Emin left soon afterwards, that same evening.

## Chapter 3

Four weeks passed. Jasper quickly found that he wasn't ready at all to be a recluse, and he didn't particularly want to sit carving wood all the time. He did his meditation exercises and his Combat Unlock practice faithfully every day, but he felt he was stretched like a tightrope and if he let go for a second he would go insane.

Voices spoke in his head, which he had to hope came from real spirits, and pictures from his childhood rose up constantly and vividly before his eyes. It was unbearable for someone as young as himself to be without friends, lovers or even teachers, for a period of time impossible to determine.

Emin had left him some coarse paper and charcoal pencils and he tried to stick to a routine of drawing during what he counted as morning, and taking walks through the jungle in the afternoon. Jasper had become good at drawing from long hours of practice at Void Star, drawing sigils and seals of spirits for the simplest type of magic spells.

The sigils he was drawing now started to turn into mandalas of cosmic proportions, and he dared not put magical intents into them to go home or to have other people here with him, in case they clashed with Emin's spells. Emin had told him there were some delicate adjustments he would have to make before Jasper could go home without any ill effects. Also Emin had apparently constructed The Retreat as a place solely for himself to live in and had bound it against being colonised by other people; they were only welcome on temporary visits, to discuss problems on Vahan with Emin and ask for his help. Kings and chieftains had come for this purpose; however it did not happen frequently because Emin watched the planet so closely that he usually identified any problems before they did.

One day Jasper sneaked a look around the house for the magical tools they had spoken about. All he found was a locked wooden cupboard, with the black mirror and a large cloth-bound magic book sitting outside, so presumably the rest of the tools were in the cupboard. The book was interesting and potentially useful, and he began to read a chapter from it every day when he came back from his walk.

A day came when he saw a craft in the sky coming towards the area where the house stood. He had no way of knowing whether it belonged to the platypus aliens or to someone else entirely. It was shiny and golden, like a round gold-painted car which had been hoisted up and fired into space.

Perhaps it wasn't prudent to stand pointedly in the open staring up at it, but he was past caring by now. Any company would be good, even hostile company, and



he thought that even if someone was to attack him it would have less influence on whether he got back home than what Emin was doing down on the planet surface.

The ship drew near to the ground and hovered, and a dark patch appeared which was a panel door sliding open. A flight of white steps was lowered, and then came a short man with a mop of untidy brown hair descending the ladder. His clothes were pale, diaphanous robes and looked nothing like a space suit, more like a fancy-dress costume.

“Are you the great magician?” he asked, eyeing Jasper.

Somewhere inside Jasper was a voice wanting to say “yes.” He ignored it and instead said what they had agreed upon: “I’m his apprentice.”

“Oh.” The man stopped dead and carried on looking at him searchingly. “Well, can you do the same things that he can do?”

“Some of them”, Jasper answered cautiously. “What’s this about?”

“I want him to make me a creature that will track my girl, find her and bring her back to me,” the man said. “I’ll pay him. Where is he?”

“Private business down on the planet surface,” Jasper advised, “and I don’t know how long he will be. Do you come from Vahan?”

“Of course, same as you do,” the stranger said.

Jasper decided not to correct him. He could see an opportunity to escape and also to advance his magical practice up to the next level, for he had read the chapter in the book about making servitors of the same kind as Emin’s raven.

A few hours later they were sitting on the grass in front of the house marking out a magic circle with a charcoal pencil, and sprinkling herbs around the outside. Jasper had no idea what names these people used for the four elemental quarters, so he used Earth ones and his companion didn’t seem to notice anything.

The client had told Jasper a little about himself. His name was Lonnie, and he came from a small village where he had more or less grown up with his girlfriend Jodi. A few weeks ago he had called round to her family’s home to find her missing without trace, and no-one in the community could find out what had happened. He was happy to take Jasper back with him to the planet surface in lieu of the payment he would have given to Emin; in fact he would have liked to pay Jasper and throw in the lift free, except that the journey took slightly over twelve hours and would necessitate opening an additional canister of food and oxygen, which were quite expensive.

After setting up the defences around the circle, Jasper picked up a shoulder patch and a fire stick which Lonnie had given him to use in the ceremony. The patch was one that Lonnie wore every day according to the customs of his people,

and the fire stick was a weapon. Jasper began burning the name and form of the creature he was creating onto the shoulder patch, and its instructions to track Jodi and bring her back. Then came the more advanced part of the operation: shaping a portion of his own etheric energy so that it would form the body and mind of the creature. He wanted to work in some of Lonnie's as well but that could feel rather harsh and invasive, especially when doing it for the first time, a detail which he hadn't told Lonnie.

"These shoulder patches- do you ever write or engrave on them yourselves?" he asked cautiously.

"The ideal is to sew on them," said Lonnie. "I find that a bit tiresome, so I haven't done it yet, but some of the people in my village have embroidered a whole battle scene or a picture of people trading goods."

Jasper felt relieved. "Perfect! After we've finished I want you to sew on it, 'I bind you to me.' Then I'll make sure the creature is tied to your thread. Could you do that fairly quickly, before we leave?"

"Letters are awkward- but all right, if it will bring Jodi back."

The creature Jasper made was called Trevik and it looked like a combination of a monkey and a dog. The name meant 'track, retrieve.' If you write out those two words and delete the vowels and repeated consonants you get TRKV, which can be rearranged to TRVK. Jasper was pleased with it, but he reflected that if he had been more experienced he wouldn't have kept returning to the thought that it had to be roughly animal shaped: it could just as easily have looked like a bicycle, or a doughnut. It had two modes of walking: upright to move quickly through the environment and on all fours, sniffing the ground with its enlarged nose.

He could see Trevik hazily at the edge of his field of vision, which was a bonus because he didn't want to lose contact yet. But after he had closed down the circle the servitor suddenly became much fainter, almost transparent. A few minutes later he heard a click and wondered what it was, then realized it was a snuffle as he could just about distinguish Trevik putting his large snout down to the ground and beginning to search the area where the circle had been.

After that Lonnie did his sewing, which seemed to be something both men and women in his culture learned how to do at a young age, and Jasper busied himself with putting the finishing touches to Trevik and at the same time trying to make some kind of decent meal for both of them out of bits of vegetable and bitu fruit. Emin was evidently completely vegetarian because the few animals that lived here were not suitable for eating. At least he wouldn't have to live on a diet like this for

much longer because they were planning to leave on what counted as the following morning.

## Chapter 4

On the ship Jasper examined the controls minutely, and wished he was more technically minded.

"It's easy," said Lonnie. "You can steer for a while if you like. Every time I do this I always think I would like someone to talk to on the way, so this will be fun."

"Where do you go?" Jasper asked.

"Not into space usually. As you know, there's nowhere to go except Emin's Retreat. I use it to travel between kingdoms mostly, for negotiations about buying and selling. It's boring but my father does it, and I'm learning the same job. Jodi's still with her parents, or was till she vanished, and so am I, but next year we're planning to start a home together."

"I really hope you find her. I've never been on an airship that's a spaceship as well."

"Haven't you? Where do you come from? They've got them nearly everywhere- it saves building two ships for when you need to go faster, and go through space."

"The place I come from is very small, and I haven't seen it for years", Jasper said carefully. "When I decided to become a magician I had to leave and train in magical lodges; I moved around and never stayed in the same one for very long. You know- no ties. Emin's the best teacher I've met."

He pondered whether he was lying too much with the last statement, but why not be generous? Emin might yet get him out of here.

"Tell me about it," said Lonnie. "Is it exciting? Do you make things burst into flames?"

"It's possible in some circumstances. But you should be careful with fire."

"Oh, come on, you can tell me your secrets. No-one's listening on this ship, and I won't repeat them."

"It's not as dramatic as people think. Mainly it's just strong intent without being conflicted. You have to know exactly what you want, then relax and take your mind off it."

"I know what I want, Jodi back, and I can't take my mind off that."

Jasper decided to risk a more intimate conversation. "Are you and Jodi sleeping together?"

"Yes, we haven't got rules about it in my village. Some of the places we trade with though, they make you wait till you've set up home. It's terrible. Supposing you got killed during the year? Or if she vanished like Jodi has, you'd regret it for the

rest of your life. I miss her enough when I go on trips, without her not even being mine.”

“I wish I had a girlfriend”, said Jasper. “I am allowed to. Though Emin said something about austerity later on in the path which worried me. I’m not cut out for being a hermit- found that out when I spent this last month on my own waiting for Emin to come back.”

“Won’t he be annoyed when he finds out you’ve left The Retreat?” asked Lonnie.

“He said it’s okay, if his business takes a lot longer than he thought it would. And it has- I never thought a month could seem that long.”

“I’ll bet it did. Washed up on an island with a girl would be better. When I’ve found Jodi I’ll introduce you to some of her friends.”

The gradual darkening of the window panel was a shock to Jasper after so long under constant daylight and made him feel instantly tired. It couldn’t be evening falling out here in space, but it looked like it because of their angle to the sun. He excused himself and lay down on the makeshift bed which jutted out from one side of the ship like a shelf and was covered by a single blanket. From his position on the bed the ship looked like a mass of shiny, bloated white pipes which ended in metal fittings. There were no blinds to cover the window panel and the stars and gas clouds were constantly visible right in front of them, so if anything was to go wrong they would get a panoramic view of it.

As Jasper watched the stars he began to wonder if Lonnie would want a turn at sleeping, but he never finished the thought and found himself in a dream. Around him was deep darkness and there was something pulling at his solar plexus; it felt like a bundle of plant stems that had grown into his stomach. Then he saw Trevik floating beside him, the edges of his form blurred and fading to an indistinct mist which was surprisingly coloured turquoise.

“You’re not supposed to be attached to me. Go off on your own,” Jasper said. He had the strange impression that he was saying a line from a play which someone else had told him to say, and he didn’t know what the line meant; in fact he didn’t know what he was talking about at all.

Trevik appeared to be shaking. Jasper felt the wet snout pushing against his chest like a pet dog, and the creature looked up at him as if searching desperately for words. “Trail...ended”, he said at last. “Go!” He resumed clinging on tightly to Jasper, with arms Jasper could see and tendrils he couldn’t see.

Suddenly the dream changed to a park with a dilapidated building standing in the centre. The fields were well-kept: this would be better than walking in the jungle.

But why was there smoke coming towards him from behind the building- or was it fog? He remembered no more until a few hours later when a jolt awoke him.

"It's nothing," Lonnie said. "I've had to turn, that's all, because of approaching the planet. That's the problem with small ships."

Slowly Jasper remembered his last thoughts just before falling asleep. "Would you like a turn at sleeping now?"

"No", said Lonnie. "I'm usually on my own, aren't I? So I time it so that I don't. Unless you really do want to steer, and as you're new to flying these ships it wouldn't be safe if I was asleep."

Jasper felt foolish. Then his dream came back to him. At first it didn't make any sense, but he unpacked it in his mind. Of course- the trail had ended because they were out in space. If you were to use any animal for tracking it would stop if it came to space, or the ocean, and Trevik had found the environment unsettling because he didn't understand it. "Go" translated as "I can't go off on my own in this place; I'll have to go with you where I'll be safe."

"Hey, Lonnie," Jasper said as he got off the bed. "Have you got any personal items of Jodi's- clothes or anything? We'll have to give our tracker the scent again after we land."

Lonnie took a pin from somewhere in the folds of his robe. "Only this. It's been mine for a while, but Jodi gave it to me. I thought we'd already done that?"

"It's different when you go through space. That should be fine- I'll get him to psychometrise it and look for the second- last owner."

The pin was shaped like a red ribbon tied in a bow. It didn't look like something a man would wear, but it must be like the sewing: different customs here from the ones Jasper was used to on Earth.

Another couple of hours and they were above the planet surface drawing near to Lonnie's village. By now they had it all worked out that Jasper would stay with Lonnie for a while. "Our people are happy to accommodate strangers", Lonnie explained, "as long as they're prepared to earn their keep. That usually means working in the fields."

Jasper could certainly see himself more as a farmer than a warrior. He wondered how Emin was getting on as a warlord, and what would happen if they met while they were both on the planet surface. Would the knight get squashed in between the two of them and implode?

For the moment the next hurdle was the village, and Jasper gave his tunic a quick brush down. He had been wearing it for weeks and it was stained with sweat, dirt and grass. He could always pitch it as part of the trouble he was in, that the

aliens hadn't even given him proper clothes. But he wasn't planning to tell the people on Vahan about the aliens, nor about his own origin as an outworlder from the Earth.

The dominant window panel no longer showed stars and clouds of gas; now it was a green area like pampas, and he recognised the tall rushes and grasses of Vahan under the red sky. The ship dropped rapidly and came to rest, and the side panel slid open like a mouth. As they disembarked Jasper saw that they had landed outside what would on Earth have been a garage; it was built onto the side of the house and was obviously of the correct dimensions to accommodate the ship and Lonnie's father's ship as well. It was more rounded than an Earth garage with a bit of thatch on top, which was surprising; it must be that there was no risk of the ship setting it alight.

The house was also rounded, almost like a jungle hut, however it was of stone and solid like a bungalow and the windows were made from a material like semi-transparent plastic.

There were other similar houses all around, although only a few had the garage attachment. In the distance people walked, some of them carrying what looked like water pots, and all wearing the same flowing robes and shoulder pads as Lonnie. The men wore white robes, while the women's robes were in a variety of softer colours like pink and lilac. The general atmosphere was medieval just as it had been in the places Jasper had seen before, except that Lonnie's spaceship must have been an everyday feature because no-one looked twice at it.

Lonnie closed the door panel and it locked with a click. "I'll put the ship away in a bit," he said. "Let's see if my parents are home."

For a moment Jasper wished it was a few hours later and he was programming Trevik to start tracking again, using the ribbon pin. That was the kind of activity he felt more at home with. His family had always seen him as a little shy and antisocial, but he was only protecting himself from being too upset when he went away for his training. If they were in any trouble he would have been there like a shot.

Lonnie unlocked the door and a middle-aged woman emerged from one of the rooms. She had kind eyes that were just beginning to develop lines around them, and the same brown hair as Lonnie. Her robe was a deep rose pink, and her shoulder pad showed a carnival scene stitched in brown cotton.

She smiled. "Hallo, Lonnie." Then her gaze turned to Jasper. "What happened to you?"

“I got stranded on The Retreat. No proper clothes and only plants to eat. I went there to study with Emin the wizard, but he got called away.”

Jasper was shocked to hear that his voice had a tremor in it. The events of the last few weeks were suddenly looking more like an ordeal than an adventure.

“So sorry, dear. We’ll help you get sorted and then you can go home. Lonnie, what’s the progress with finding Jodi? I’ve been worrying about her all the time you’ve been away.”

“Jasper did a spell for us”, Lonnie said. “He’s a wizard too. It should help us to find her soon.”

Now they were both looking at him, relying on him... and the layout of the house was completely unfamiliar. Kitchen, living room, bathroom? This place was a law unto itself. Again Jasper wished he was alone with Trevik. He had only just learned this kind of magic, yet it was more familiar to him than anything on this planet.



## Chapter 5

Jasper was like a baby, learning the ropes of the society he was in. The task he had set himself was to pick up those details while pretending not to be new to it, and that was taxing even for someone like Jasper who had already trained his mind in several kinds of meditation. Fortunately for him the countries of Vahan had varied customs much like those of Earth, and the people of Lonnie's village accepted that he came from an area with very different customs from their own.

During those first few weeks they gave him white robes to wear and tools such as farm implements and cutlery, and showed him how to use them. They made it clear that they expected him to pay for the items by working on a farm and then to go back to his home, and they were rather critical of the Void Star Training School that he described to them for not having given him some basic items to take on his journey to The Retreat.

He continued to stay with Lonnie's family because they had a spare room, which was actually Jodi's for the times she stayed with them and was a poignant reminder of her absence. They were still searching the pampas area outside the village and Jasper joined in when he wasn't working on the farm.

Lonnie's mother was a perfect hostess, giving him tasty meals and helping him adjust to the surroundings without asking too many questions. He soon got used to the eating room, the work room and the small bedrooms one for each person, (though he was sure couples spent most nights both in the same one.) There was no bathroom, just a washing and toilet area in one corner at the back of the house.

Lonnie's father was away on one of his business trips when Jasper first arrived and didn't return for two weeks. When he did come back he didn't say much to Jasper, but asked Lonnie and his mother about him. He was a tall and sturdily built man with a beard and intense dark eyes. They didn't seem to have any other children besides Lonnie.

There were plenty of children in the village and Jasper often passed some of them on his way to the farm. They wore smaller versions of the adult robes without the shoulder patches, and they were usually walking towards the meeting house in the centre which took the place of a school, where they appeared to spend a larger part of the day than they did with their families, only returning quite late in the evening.

The children looked at Jasper with interest as he was a stranger, but he could easily have passed for one of their people. Everyone Jasper had seen on this

planet so far resembled the Caucasian races of Earth. Dogs and horses were the same as on Earth but the other animals and the plant life differed. It was possible there had been interference from the aliens he had seen, or another alien race, as if they had selected what they deemed to have been the most successful models from elsewhere. But were these the most successful? There had been ruthlessness and oppression in Earth's history, often associated with what was duplicated here on Vahan.

Strangest of all was the technology; even though these people had spaceships everything else was very basic, mainly just running water, and something equivalent to oil lamps for heating and lighting, and oil stoves for cooking. The stove at Lonnie's house was in the work room, because cooking counted as work. There must have been technicians who knew how to build and repair the ships, yet the rest of their society was like Earth before the Industrial Revolution. They regarded the ships as transport essential for trading; however the goods they traded appeared to be staples like crops, animals, implements and furniture- no machines. Jasper questioned them about it, and they said machines were dirty and spread dirt to everything around them; it was better for work to be done with tools and with their own hands.

There had been quite a few problems with technology on the Earth Jasper had left behind. 'Dirty' was a very apt word for how the natural environment had become at one time, and there was a danger it would be destroyed completely. During Jasper's childhood the word on everyone's lips was 'filters'. It turned out that the necessary filters to clean up the environment had already been invented but had not been released for economic reasons. Human beings died and animals became extinct, when they could have been saved. It was only when the pollution reached a critical level that the filters had been used, and although there was still some way to go the worst of it had been dealt with.

The bee crisis was unfortunate too. The artificial pollinators had also been invented some time ago, and not released. There were many more deaths this time.

"We just had to leave them to it," Beatrice had said, in response to Jasper's questions. She was the head tutor for new first-year students at Void Star. "They wouldn't ask us for help, wouldn't even talk to us, and the world was overpopulated anyway. The population now is about right for the Earth to support." From what Jasper had seen so far it looked like Vahan was going to avoid that pitfall in its evolution.

Jasper wasn't surprised to start dreaming about Jodi as he was sleeping in her room and joining in whenever they searched for her. By now he had met Jodi's parents and her brother Barra. Her father walked with a stick and was unable to join in the searches because of weak health, and her mother like all the local women remained at home doing domestic tasks except when she went shopping in the market. Barra however became a companion and in the evenings Jasper would go with him and Lonnie to the equivalent of a pub- a shop with benches where men talked and drank fermented juice drinks. They only stayed about an hour- not as long as their Earth equivalents would have spent there, but it was enough for Jasper to feel the beginnings of being normal again and therefore invaluable to him.

The first time he dreamed about Jodi the nature of the dream drew his attention: if this was a psychic vision he should be able to locate her himself. The park was there again with the dilapidated building at the centre, just as he had seen it in his earlier dream while he was on the spaceship. Then he saw a girl who fitted Lonnie's description of Jodi; very slim, long-legged with dark hair gathered in a ponytail. Even the finer details were right, like a pointed nose and chin.

She was kneeling down petting a dog and looking around her anxiously. Jasper loved dogs- there had always been one in the house when he was growing up. He moved towards it, and as he did so a group of girls stepped out from the mist behind the building. Jodi looked at them uncertainly; their presence seemed to trouble her.

Something swished past Jasper and got to the dog before he did. It was Trevik, nuzzling the dog in a friendly way. Without warning his perspective altered and he was looking through Trevik's eyes; he was the one with a wide muzzle, pushing it into the dog's fur and smelling a rangy coat.

Once again he felt the tendrils, like plant roots laced with intricate knots, folded over and over and tangled together. "Was there an umbilical cord I should have cut?" Like the previous time, Jasper didn't understand what he had just said.

His mind screamed, "Have you found her? Bring her back!" But his mouth wouldn't move to say it because he wasn't Jasper, he was Trevik, and the fog was thickening and changing to all the outlandish colours Trevik could see and he was choking, he would have to go back to being Jasper....but they had never been separate in the first place. Jasper woke, the darkness lying solid upon him like the fog.

Emin too was asleep, deliberately projecting his astral body out from the military camp to observe what was happening in other parts of Vahan. He was at this moment checking a country in the opposite hemisphere of the planet from the two

warring kingdoms, and he had a strong feeling that Jasper was around and was tied down by something that held his spirit tightly to this planet. Emin had devoted some time to unpicking the knight from Jasper stitch by stitch till he was free, and sewing the knight laboriously into himself instead. There should be nothing now to hold Jasper except time and place, which could be corrected by fitting him to the appropriate time portal and spinning him through it.

It might not take as long as he had originally thought after all, and as soon as he located the right portal he could send it to Jasper and maybe even put Jasper through it remotely from a distance. Jasper should be waiting at The Retreat, but even if he had moved and he was here he should still be unfettered and ready to leave. What could have gone wrong now?

Emin probed but all he could see were dogs, many dogs in a field. He realised that one of the dogs was a servitor. So there's another magician here, who made that!

Before you can control others you must first control yourself, and Emin had always had a struggle with his desire to be the top wizard and if possible the only wizard on Vahan. He began to remind himself that after all other magicians are allowed to exist; but his concentration was gone, he missed the moment and woke without gaining any further information. It would have to wait, because they were at a critical point in the campaign with the battles becoming fiercer each day.

## Chapter 6

"This is the day you get to meet those girls, Jasper," Lonnie said at breakfast the next morning. "There's a dance. I won't really make you wait till we've found Jodi."

Jasper looked up from his meal, which was something like bacon and tomato only not from a pig and not from a tomato plant. "Oh? Where's that being held?"

"It's in a hall at the edge of Busheen," (which was the name of the village). "Young people will be coming from three other villages: Arfield and Glinno and Brackell. We arrange the dances as often as we can, though sometimes I have to miss them if I'm away on a work trip. I always take Jodi- she loves dancing. The regulars know she's missing, and I expect one of them will dance with me to try and cheer me up."

"I wish she was here", said Jasper. "I'm on it, believe me."

"I can see how seriously you're taking this," said Lonnie. "Don't beat yourself up. Come with me tonight and have a good time."

When Jasper got to work the farm labourers too were talking about the dance. They all came from the local area and were very familiar with the social events. They were sowing a crop which would first grow up tall and dark green and later would become packed with bunches of fat grain, and as they worked they made lustful comments about the girls who were going to be at the dance. Jasper didn't say much: he was still learning their ways and manners.

About half an hour before the lunch break, when food was provided in a yard next to the farmhouse, a man came running across the fields towards them. He was wearing the garments of another area which were rather like green jeans with a sacking tunic at the top. As he got closer they could see his face was very white.

"The dance is off!" he yelled. "More girls have gone missing. Six are gone from these parts, then there's the one you're looking for already, and another five from the settlements beyond. We're to keep our womenfolk indoors, and send out a search party tonight."

At once the men were in fighting mode, raising curiously shaped farm implements in the air and also others more familiar to Jasper because they resembled pitchforks, although they were called pids. A chorus of shouts went up on the general theme of 'let me get at them and I'll kill them.'

One burly man, his eyes bright with the infectious mood, shoved Jasper and asked pointedly, "can YOU fight?"

"I know a kind of hand-to-hand combat." Seeing the look on the peasant's face Jasper added quickly, "and I'll happily use a pid too, beside you."

"There! Good!" he exclaimed, slapped Jasper on the shoulder and turned back to shouting with the others.

After some words from the owner of the farmhouse the riot subsided, but the men were restless, stopped work early and afterwards marched into the countryside with weapons and torches to search all the evening. But they found nothing.

Lonnie and his father joined in the search as well. Although they belonged to a merchant class that was different from the farm workers in many ways, they echoed exactly the same cries for revenge and they too were armed, with their fire sticks. It was the first time Jasper had seen a fire stick since he had used one in his magical ceremony.

As Jasper lay down that night on the cushioned mound that was a Vahan bed, he thought about the group of girls who had appeared behind Jodi in his dream of the previous night. Had there been twelve of them? He wished he had counted. He decided to try astral projection to gather information, although he couldn't do it as precisely as Emin and he would have to start from a lucid dream.

He lay still and watched the hypnagogic visions begin: the little pictures that appear before the eyes and then gradually turn into dreams. The trick is to stay alert, watching them, and feel the intent to enter into a dream without losing awareness. After some minutes it happened: he found himself dreaming he was standing in a street next to a shop which was getting smaller and moving away from him, and he knew it was a dream.

Just then Jasper started to feel sexually aroused. It wasn't just the normal need for sexual release that occurs every so often; it was something much stronger, as if he had to find a girl at once and seduce her. He had noticed how quickly his co-workers on the farm had switched from erotic jokes to aggression and he had tried to do the same and channel his energy into something else, although not fruitless aggression, more a quest for justice. But now the original feelings came back in full force. Maybe it was because the dance had been a bigger deal to him than to the others.

He realised this could be useful because after all he was looking for a group of luscious girls. In fact there was probably a sexual motive for the kidnapping, because all the girls who had been taken were in the same age group as himself. He made himself as relaxed as possible so as not to wake up.

Jasper glanced at the dream images and recognised the shop as a sweetshop from his childhood, and he smiled at the banal symbolism of all the sweets going away and turned away from it. "I want to go to the park with the old building," he said, visualising it strongly.

The ground shifted under his feet and the park formed around him, with no mist this time and no Jodi with a dog, just the building. "Are the girls in here?" he asked, and he pushed the door, which crumbled a little but did not open. He was about to call for Trevik when he noticed a movement to one side; there was someone at the back behind the building. He walked round it and there were the girls sitting still and quiet on the grass, except for the one he had seen who was leaning against the corner of the building and peering around it.

She was slight with thin, fair hair and a wistful, sensitive face. She smiled at him and said, "Hallo, I'm Marralinsi. Call me Linzi. I like you." She walked up to Jasper and put her arms around him.

"This is turning into an ordinary dream," Jasper thought regretfully. "Just the dream I want, but she might not be real."

Then he was making love to the girl, and trying at the same time to remember the tricks he had learned at Void Star for telling whether a dream character is a living person. Look at her eyes, and her aura....

Her aura flared into colour, but it was the crazy colours that Trevik could see instead of the normal spectrum.

"Mind control during sex is fun," Jasper thought. "Almost tantric. Need to ask her something." Verbally he said, "We have to rescue you. Where is this park?"

"I don't know," she said, muffled. "Maybe draw it? And we're not in-"

Jasper reached orgasm, and immediately awoke.

The next day Jasper asked Lonnie's family if one of the missing girls was called Marralinsi. Lonnie's father gave him a sharp look of horror and motioned him to sit down at the table in the eating room. "Now, Jasper," he said, "don't whatever you do mention that name. She lives right out in the wilds beyond Arfield, and there's no way you could have met her since you've been here. We believe you're a wizard, but if you start naming names to the others they'll think you're in on the kidnapping, and they'll be round here with their pids to kill you."

"All right, I'll say nothing." Jasper was looking at the floor thinking that he should have known that, he shouldn't have had to be told. He added, "but can I at least try to draw a picture of the place where I think they're being held? In my dream....my vision, she said to draw it."

“That’s all right, so long as it’s just a vision of a place and no names, draw it. That’s what we would all hope a wizard could do.”

Lonnie’s father fetched some of the same coarse, plain paper that Emin had left for Jasper to use at The Retreat, and some well-crafted colouring pencils. Like almost everything else in Busheen the pencils appeared to have been made by hand, probably using charcoal and vegetable dyes. Jasper was well-practised at drawing from life as well as creating abstract sigils, and the pencils were pleasant to use.

As he worked Lonnie’s mother came up behind him. She spoke softly. “We say that dreaming of a girl you have never met means she will be your true love. Do you say the same in your country?”

“Uh-yes. Some people do.”

“Lonnie wants you to stay here until we’ve found all the missing girls. Most of the youngsters here met their partners at the dances; Lonnie and Jodi already knew one another but they’re mad about the dances, and their friends they see there, like Marralinsi. I know at the farm they say just pay your debts and then leave the village, but it’s different every time a stranger comes here. We need you.”

Jasper mumbled, “thank you, you’ve been very kind to me.” He was thinking, “if she only knew how much time I have to buy before I can even attempt to return home.”



## Chapter 7

Emin walked proudly through the hall in the armour of Laurel, knight of the kingdom of Ramoon. They had been victorious in the final battle of the campaign, and he had managed to trace the stronghold of the 'platypus aliens' that Jasper had described who were known as the Zarens. There had been many tricks on the battlefield: Emin had cast spells and laid glamours over his foes, and had flown from one place to another in the form of his totem raven. It served them right for being led so easily into an unnecessary war.

The King he had just defeated, Moraz, would never have admitted while he ruled that a race from another world was the power behind him. But now he had grudgingly confessed it, and had arranged for Knight Laurel to meet them to discuss terms.

"You know they betrayed you?" Emin had declared, when he cornered Moraz in one of the lofty rooms. Outside his men were sacking the castle.

"Never", Moraz said. "They fought for me to the end." His hand fluttered towards a weapon like a scimitar which he carried in his belt. He wanted to draw it but Knight Laurel's sword, the same one Jasper had originally been given, was thrust in front of him and he dared not move.

"The two Dukes who I serve had no real quarrel with your kingdom," Emin said. "It was a minor matter; it wouldn't have escalated. I have intelligence that your allies the Zarens were the ones who engineered my mission- they wanted me to defeat you. Traitors."

Moraz glared at him, still not believing it.

"I'm not going to kill you; you can serve my Dukes in Ramoon. Try and be their friend and perhaps they will come to realise this war was over a trifle. It was staged, and I hate people who manipulate rulers like that. Now, arrange for me to meet these Zarens before I take you home as my prisoner."

As he approached the conference room Emin reached out mentally and reinforced the illusion he had already cast over the alien beings that he was Jasper, and he was on their side. He tightened his auric shields and held his mind still on one point. It appeared that the Zarens could not tell the difference between a wizard such as himself and one at Jasper's stage of development, and that could be his biggest advantage.

When he entered the room there were six of them lounging on the wooden chairs, their flippers hanging incongruously over the seat cushions. There was a

slight smell different from human flesh, and their gaze held him more strongly than that of a human. The one in the middle appeared to be the leader; he narrowed his eyes and said, "You've settled down, I see. Well done for your victory. But I'm sure you can see how much better it would be for us if you didn't retain those awkward memories from before you came here."

"They've faded now," Emin said placidly. "Mostly all I remember now is my loyalty to the Dukes of Ramoon- and you of course. But I'm puzzled, because Moraz said you were his ally."

"He's a liar," barked the Zaren leader. "We never were. We wanted his capital city because he was ruling it like a moron, and we want to make it into a paradise so that your people can share in it and benefit. There will be beautiful palaces, sumptuous feasts, silks and jewels and furs; and there will be women. We are going to place many young women here who will perform shows, and give pleasure to the men who win victories in our wars. The first group of women will be here any day- we just have to build their house. The construction of Paradise City starts today. We are going to move out the few inhabitants who remain and keep only the builders here working on it."

One of the other creatures took up the story. "We plan to conquer as many of the surrounding territories as we can. It will all be in the name of Ramoon which will soon have the most impressive empire this world has ever seen. You will be our champion and next in rank below you will be the armies of Ramoon – we'll make sure you are always victorious."

"There's one thing I would like to know- why did you want me to be the one to win your Paradise City?" asked Emin. "Any of the renowned knights of Ramoon could have done it. Did you specially need one who was a wizard?"

"Ah, that is next on the agenda," answered the leader. "Yes, it had to be a wizard. We need an extra layer on our force field to protect the city, put on through magic. Our force field can only control cold, mechanical energies, or mental energy. It's useless against emotions, so to keep anyone out who hates us we need a boundary made from what you people call magic. When you do this you will be King here and will have the first pick of all the luxuries."

Emin thought, "my divinations must have been cold mental energy, then." He kept his mind on that idea and did not think about anything else the Zarens had told him, in order to keep the spell on them strong. He said politely, "I will make your extra force field, but it will take a while to complete. First may I request some time to take our prisoner Moraz back to the Dukes? That is the custom in Ramoon,

unless we execute the leader we conquer, and we don't judge that he deserves execution."

"All right," answered the Zaren leader, "but keep the delay to a minimum. We want to please your two Dukes- after all, they are our ally."

Emin almost wavered in his mental control, but he kept it and strode out of the hall.

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Lonnie was poring over Jasper's finished drawing with all the maps in front of him that he used for navigating to different trading posts. Many of the maps were not of a large enough scale to show individual parks and the window panel on the ship would show them best, but they would have to know which general area to search in. Jasper found a crystal rock and tied it to a length of twine to make a pendulum, and he added the red ribbon pin and tied that against the rock as well. He held it over the maps and concentrated on the missing girls.

At first the pendulum was only hanging down and bobbing slightly, and then eventually, over one of the maps, it began to rotate slowly in a circle. "That's it- which place is this?" Jasper asked.

"It's an outlying area near the coast: quite a way from here, but still in this country. I'll get Barra and some of the search party to come with us in the ship; not the men from the farm."

They made the journey a few days later. Lonnie's ship moved differently when it was being used more like a helicopter or plane, and the passengers all sat a little way away from Jasper looking at him respectfully. He had become known as the Wizard Who Sees Visions.

Jasper was contemplating what to do if the park failed to appear- but he needn't have worried because the look of shock on his face when he recognised it in the window panel was unmistakeably genuine. It was exactly the same as in his dreams, except that it was deserted. They got out of the ship and explored the surrounding grassland and also went inside the building, which was falling down so much that the door opened easily. Inside it was full of rubble and creepers. Afterwards they spent a couple of hours going over every bit of the park, but there was no sign of the women anywhere.

"We must be too late," Lonnie said. "If they were here, they've left no trace." He looked almost too shaken to fly the ship back, but in the end he did it with only a little help from the others.

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Emin was in a conference at a secret location with three political chiefs from different countries of Vahan, having left Moraz at a waystation. The place was guarded and camouflaged and had magical wards around it. He was wearing his raven- feather cloak and had temporarily restored his features to their previous appearance, and as the leaders sat watching he pointed to a chart on the wall. "You must attack here," he said, "and take warriors with you who are full of anger and hatred against the Zarens. I understand they have taken some women who they are hoping to use as prostitutes: you should easily be able to find people who are angry about that. It would be best to tell them just before the attack. Destroy all the Zarens and their ships."

Emin went through a long and detailed plan he had devised: military strategies and political and economic ones as well. These three men had all been to The Retreat for his advice in the past and although the final decisions were theirs he was hoping they would carry out at least some of his plan. The final stage of it involved building missiles and training them on the skies, and if any of the Zaren ships approached again to shoot them down straight away. The leaders were sceptical about that one.

"Once you build missiles other similar weapons follow, and machines," one of them said. "Before we know it our countries will be full of them."

"You'll have to take the risk- it's worth it," Emin replied.

"We'll see", the other responded. But all of them were clearly worried about the threat of constant manipulated wars in their lands.

## Chapter 8

Jasper and Linzi were naked, cuddled up in the long reeds. It seemed that they had been making love for a long time. "In the stories where I come from, I wouldn't get you until the end," Jasper was saying. "It's vicious. Especially after that period of enforced celibacy, eating limp leaves all the time."

Linzi laughed. "I agree," she said. "Not fair." She was so gentle and vulnerable, a little slip of a creature, and Jasper wanted only to protect her.

Just then he realised he was dreaming, and the landscape opened out and the sky brightened just as they would in a lucid dream on Earth. The sky was now pearl pink, and Jasper remembered that its physical colour would be red. He took in the surroundings and found that they were still in the park, where they had already searched.

He sat up and said, "Linzi, sweet, this can't go on. We have to bring you home. Those stories are gonna be true after all, because we're not together physically. We're dreaming."

People do not always react well to being told they are dreaming; sometimes they get frightened and wake up. Linzi didn't, but she looked sad and said, "you mean when I wake up I'll still be in prison?"

"In prison where? You must know!"

Jasper thought quickly and brought out the red ribbon pin, which shone with a blinding light. "Give this to Jodi and all of you concentrate on it, and on us finding you. Trevik!"

He realised Trevik was already with them as foxy ears and a broad muzzle rose up from under the reeds. Trevik gave him an injured look and cried, "found!" His speech had improved, and he pronounced the word as clearly as a human being.

"No, no, we have to find them on the physical plane," Jasper started to explain. "Physical, real..." he woke up.

Later Jasper sat in a light trance in which he could see Trevik beside him, and tried his utmost to explain that he didn't just want Trevik to take him to the girls when he was asleep; he wanted Trevik to bring them back here physically which was after all the meaning of the word 'retrieve.' Trevik seemed to be irritatingly dense. He objected that he couldn't do the 'retrieve' part because of 'walls', so he took Jasper through the walls to the girls instead. Jasper kept telling him to find a way round it, and also find out what the fog was that appeared in his dreams.

After an hour or so of this Jasper noticed that Trevik was draining his energy and he felt exhausted. He should have specified another energy source besides himself right from the start, and he had forgotten to do so. He thought about the energies on Vahan; the only fuel appeared to be the oil that they used in the lamps and stoves and the fire sticks. That wasn't very attractive stuff- he would have to find something else, and the instruction needed to be written on a shoulder patch.

For the last few weeks Lonnie had been wearing a different shoulder patch design which covered up the stitching about Trevik. Jasper hadn't realised that if these people really didn't want to sew they could get an artificial design to stick on top of the patch: Lonnie obviously thought the Trevik design looked weird and had stuck one over it that showed a market square.

Jasper had been given a shoulder patch, but he had put it in a drawer and had not worn it, and his companions didn't seem surprised that a stranger would do that. He got it out now and wrote some words and symbols on it in charcoal which specified some of the lush vegetation of Vahan as an energy source, then he borrowed Lonnie's fire stick and ran it along, singeing all the writing. Trevik gave him an odd look because this was something new, and Jasper felt incompetent.

His magic was working in practical real-life situations, but not in exactly the right way. Jasper decided to use the paper and coloured pencils again, as sigils are the foundation of everything else in chaos magic, and every evening after work he drew ferocious and elaborate designs with many symbols to represent a prison being broken open and the prisoners released. He charged them with his will, energy from his third eye, bodily fluids, every variation he had been taught, with the intent to get the kidnapped girls out of their prison.

He was hoping that he wouldn't share Trevik's senses so much after refining the feeding instructions, but it was worse. His dreams changed; in these new ones he didn't know he was dreaming, but he often felt that he was dead, or in a coma. At the beginning he was always Trevik; it was his face on the ground with the muzzle sliding in the dirt and mud, and his body surrounded by an aura of blurred turquoise. Then he was himself again and he was walking along with Jodi, Linzi and the others through towns and countryside, and talking to them. He told them all about his life when he was on Earth, and they told him about their lives on Vahan. A long sequence of adventures started which seemed to go on for days at a time, until so much had happened that they forgot the life stories they had told one another.

The worst ones were the dreams in which he fancied Jodi as much as Linzi. She was so beautiful. He ignored the feeling and stayed close to Linzi. The mages at

Void Star didn't exactly consider adultery a sin; a lot of them were strongly in favour of promiscuity, but to Jasper emotional conflicts felt like spikes jabbing into him, and he was unwilling to do anything to provoke them.

Once he found himself on the ground licking Jodi's hand and realised it was the Trevik part of him that wanted her. Girl as goal had a multi-layered meaning with underlying feelings much more powerful than burnt on or sewn on letters, and Trevik's rudimentary mind made sense of it by bringing his master to her, playing with her as if he was her pet, then afterwards mating with dogs and other spirits that gathered round to see what was going on.

For Jasper it was like losing touch with reality: like being in the video games he had played on Earth before he started at Void Star. Select the option to love Jodi: Lonnie shoots him with a fire stick: game over. Back to the real world, but which was the real one, Earth or Vahan? Select Linzi instead of Jodi: new options unfold.

He compared Linzi with the two sexual partners he'd had in the physical world. There was Julie at High School; it hadn't been very serious just because they were still at school, and mostly they just wanted to hide from their parents that they had joined the adult world. Then Steph during his first term at Void Star, who didn't train there herself but lived in one of the houses across the road from the training school. She seemed full of fun, but then suddenly she had started to take a critical interest in Jasper's chosen career. "You're not allowed to settle down, are you?"

"That's not true. I can, but just not yet. Who wants to yet, anyway?"

Steph moved away from him slightly and said in a flat, detached voice, "I love kids. Want some around soon."

Why such a hard look when talking about children? Why not a Madonna with tears gathering, ready to fall? She moved on after a few more weeks.

He couldn't be sure if the way Linzi moved and her mischievous manner were genuine because he had only seen her dreaming self, and it might be different. Also it wasn't certain that she would remember him. Sometimes he'd heard about people who immediately recognise a soul mate who they have dreamed about and known in other lifetimes, but other times a man gets regarded as a creepy stalker for saying he's had dreams about a girl, and she doesn't remember anything.

They weren't getting any nearer to their goal of rescuing the girls, and Jasper was beginning to feel disheartened. What would his superiors at Void Star have advised him to do? There were two possible courses of action in this situation. One was to seek help from a more advanced magician and draw on his greater magical skills. The only one available was Emin and he was in the middle of creating the knight's mission, but there was a chance of contacting him astrally. The other

possibility was what his teachers called Gazing Into The Abyss, in which you deliberately probe into and face the option you have been avoiding because it holds the most danger. Jasper decided to try this first, and if there was still no progress to reach out with telepathy and try to communicate with Emin.

All this time he had been avoiding doing another time jump because Emin had warned him it would be dangerous in the present circumstances. Jasper sat down in a quiet wooded grove at the edge of the village and entered into meditation, and cautiously went through the preliminary steps for a jump. There was the winding spiral, partly imagined and partly sensed with super-senses, drawing him in while a dull hum made everything around him shake. He entered the time tunnel and a scene appeared that was first a ragged smudge, then flat pictures like a page in a comic book, then slowly the places began to solidify. He held back from diving in and watched.

The scenes cohered into a town where people wore the clothes of eighteenth-century France, a horse and cart rattled across the road....and then Jasper realised that the alternative time had arrived and it wasn't solid, it was a three-dimensional film just as a time jump was supposed to be. Certainly it was vivid and if he stepped into it he would be the main character in the film for a time. "This is what was meant to happen the first time- probably would have got myself guillotined." Black humour.

But he wouldn't actually move anywhere if he stayed: he would be more or less hallucinating and would still be in the grove in Vahan. There was nothing resembling the round vortex he had seen before in the sky which was evidently required for physical time travel. The time jump technique would be no use after all for getting away; something else was needed which he hoped Emin would know how to do. But that was for later- what was most important now was helping the girls.

So now Jasper moved to the second option and began to concentrate on making telepathic contact with Emin, and because he was making some progress with psychic dreams he willed Emin to appear to him in a dream. After a week of focussing strongly on this he was rewarded with a dream in which Emin walked slowly towards him. His form was a little muzzy and he looked like himself; the only item of the knight's that he had with him was the sword, which emitted a piercing shaft of brilliant light in the same way that the red ribbon pin had done. If it hadn't been a magic sword before it certainly was now.

"Emin! Help!" Jasper exclaimed. As he moved nearer to Emin it became easier to remember that he was dreaming.



"You're not looking good, Jasper," said Emin. "You look as if you've spliced yourself into someone, and I haven't got time to find out who it is. Where are you?"

"Staying with my friend, Lonnie. He took me down in his ship."

Jasper looked at the ground and waited for Emin to tell him off for leaving The Retreat. When that was over he could ask about his girlfriend, and Lonnie's.

"I can't help you now because you're going to wake up in a few minutes," Emin said. "Listen-these people have radios. They don't use them much: don't like technology. You'll find one in the emergency pack in the ship. Call me tomorrow at the sixth hour after noon. Punch in all nines, that way you'll remember the number."

"But I'm not- " Jasper said.

"Yes, you are. Remember, all nines."

Jasper woke up.

Six in the evening was late enough for Jasper to be back from the farm, and luckily Lonnie had no business trips that day and would be home as well. When he explained and asked to use the radio, Lonnie's eyes were as large as mill ponds. "Your wizard master arranged a radio call in a dream? I wish I could do that!"

To have someone looking at him awestruck was not quite the way Jasper had imagined it: he found he was just anxious to get on with the work in hand. They stayed on the ship to make the call because they both had an instinct that it should be secret.

Jasper punched in nines until there were enough for a code. The first time there was no answer, but he carried on and the third time he heard Emin's voice. "This is a policy call, Your Majesty. I'll take it in the next room, with the security settings on."

Emin was talking to a King?

There were rustles and crackles, and then they heard him again. "What is it, Jasper?" he asked. "I can't speak for very long."

"Some girls have gone missing," Jasper said.

"Yes, I know. It's the aliens, the Zarens. That's only the first lot of girls; they are planning on taking many more."

"Where are they?" cried Lonnie.

"Jasper, I hope you haven't got a lot of people with you; these are state secrets."

"No, only Lonnie."

"All right. Unfortunately they've been moved to the capital city, but they're not being ill-treated yet- it hasn't been rebuilt. They were keeping them in a sort of underground bunker underneath a park, with a scrambler behind it, and actually they would be safer if they were still there. But just in the last week the tunnels became unstable; gas explosions or something, and they moved them."

“What do you mean- they’re not being ill-treated yet?” asked Jasper.

“The idea is for them to be prostitutes eventually, but it won’t come to that. Don’t tell anyone this: there is going to be an attack within the next three months. I would like it sooner, but these things can’t be arranged overnight. I’m hoping the city will be destroyed before it’s even finished.”

“What can we do?”

“I don’t know. You could join up- where are you?”

“Busheen,” Jasper said.

“Antell Country,” Lonnie said.

“That country is right on the opposite side of the planet,” said Emin. “The city’s being built on the remains of the capital of Jalop, which has just been conquered by Ramoon.”

“But they took the girls from here!” exclaimed Lonnie. “They all come from our towns and villages.”

“In that case it will help to bring your people in on the attack”, said Emin. “You’ll be hearing from us- say nothing till you do. I have to go.” There was a click as the call ended.

They sat still for a long time. Then Jasper muttered, “It sounds like he’s got it.” Lonnie didn’t say anything.

The girls had been there all the time right underneath where they were standing, and the fog was the aliens’ force field. If only Jasper had selected the option for a bigger explosion the ground in the park would have cracked open and the girls could all have climbed out and run away. But too big an explosion and they would have been killed-game over, back to the real world.

## Chapter 9

Ramoon and Jalop were neighbouring kingdoms quite close together, and Emin couldn't justify taking three months to deliver Moraz to the Dukes of Ramoon. He had to return to the Zarens' capital and pretend to be supervising some of the building, and putting up the wards. He put up wards against minor demons instead of against human beings and their emotions, and he even explained his actions to some of the demons who had ties with the local area and wouldn't want to be displaced. They were pleased about all the treachery and excitement.

Emin decided to make just one visit to the group of women who were now installed in the capital. He knew he had a tendency to neglect the human side of these tragedies and just to focus on the politics, and Jasper's call had reminded him how lost the women must feel. He didn't want the Zarens to think he was visiting prostitutes before the place was even open, but it was one of the privileges they had given him.

Since he had spent all that time developing advanced magical powers Emin didn't seem to have sexual feelings anymore; he must have genuinely become a celibate sage. He hadn't expected that to happen, and had made contingency plans for a time when he would become involved with a woman. The Retreat would have had to become a holiday home for the two of them and their children, and someday in the distant future a public holiday resort.

He found the girls in a house which looked as if it was in the middle of being fixed up for people to move into. They were sitting in a partly painted lounge with soft chairs and divans around the outside, all wearing the colourful traditional clothes of the communities they came from. They fell silent when he came in.

"I am Knight Laurel," he said. "I will say one sentence only about this, and then we will talk about other subjects, for security. You are going to be rescued, soon, I hope. Now, to other subjects. Are you comfortable here? Are they treating you properly?"

One of them spoke, a thin girl with dark hair tied in a ponytail. "They took me first. They put me in a black chamber under the ground- it was horrible. They asked me what kind of personal things women need: it was really embarrassing, but they got me all the things I said, and put them in the chamber. Then they kidnapped my friends as well, and everyone else here. I told them I had to get back to my family and my partner, but they took no notice."

"I told them as well that I had to go home," said another girl, "but they wouldn't listen. I hate them."

A third girl looked at Emin slightly more sharply than the other two and asked, "would you take a message home for me?"

"I can't", said Emin. "But there's always magic. I know a wizard who can cast spells to help you."

"Do you really?" said the first girl. "I can see spirits; I see them all the time, but I couldn't tell my family. They would think I was mad. Lately I keep seeing dogs around me, playing; I believe they're guarding me. One of them walks upright on two legs sometimes. It's really funny."

"Let's hope they are looking after you," said Emin. "I would like that to be true. Have you always been able to see spirits?"

"Yes, all my life."

"The wizard I told you about could use a good psychic. His servant is a raven. If you see this raven would you be willing to relay messages to it about what the Zarens are doing? Only if you know, of course- we wouldn't expect you to find out about anything they've hidden from you."

"I certainly would. I'll look out for this raven and tell him everything that's going on."

The girl who had looked at Emin more suspiciously than the others spoke again. "This had better really be about rescuing us. Our families will find us, and the men will be along any time now looking for justice."

"You can trust me, I assure you. But remember we must not speak of these matters openly, for security."

The poor girl obviously didn't realize her menfolk were on the other side of the planet. But it was nothing that couldn't be solved with the transport ships. Even the military on Vahan didn't use the spaceships for fighting, such was their horror of becoming a technological society, but they used them for transporting troops to war zones far away. Emin took leave of the women and began making plans to have a troop ship sent to Antell Country to pick up the men whose partners or daughters had been kidnapped.

A few nights later, during the course of a lot of magical work on the astral plane, Emin took a quick look to see whether there were spirit dogs protecting the group of girls. He saw a few dogs- and there was that servitor again. This time he could see that it was mixed up with Jasper, and with Lonnie too. So Jasper must have made it, but he hadn't made it quite correctly, especially for someone who needs to travel back through a time portal. He would have to take both the creature and Lonnie

back with him otherwise he would be ripped in half. Emin wasn't sure he could unpick that as easily as he had unpicked Jasper from the knight, and even if he could they would have to be together for him to attempt it. Lonnie, he realized, was relatively undeveloped and he could feel nothing. Whatever happened to Jasper and to the creature, he wouldn't be aware of it and would simply carry on with his life as before.

It wasn't very clear to Emin what task Jasper's servitor was supposed to be doing; by the look of it he was simply behaving like a pet. There was more chance of getting results with the raven which was a powerful and much better-defined servitor.

Jodi first saw it one night just as she was falling asleep, the world fading from her eyes as she lay on one of the hard beds with only one cushion which had been provided for the girls. Trevik was beside her as he so often was, and he pricked up his ears and leaned forward to touch the raven's wings wonderingly. He recognised a creature like himself, and yet such a very different shape.

The raven looked annoyed and moved his wings away, and then addressed Jodi. "I know you- you're the one who will be giving me information. What name shall I call you?"

"I'm Jodi," she murmured drowsily. She went into a deeper sleep, and moved away to another plane far from the one that the raven inhabited.

Back in Busheen village Jasper was dreaming that he was out in the countryside walking with Trevik. Their senses and self-awareness were intermingled like they usually were at the start of his dreams, and he smelt the sharp grass very acutely as the two of them tumbled into a tangle of roadside plants and Trevik sucked up a mouthful of leaves and ate them. He raised his head, looking refreshed, and exclaimed, "'Come on, let's get away from here!'" His speech was still becoming more fluent. Then they were rolling into a spiral tunnel, and for a moment Jasper thought it was a time vortex, but it was one of the tunnels that people describe after they have had a near-death experience. The passage of time changed and slowed down; however they didn't move into other historical periods or other dimensions the way they would have done in a time vortex.

They were on a village green, although it wasn't Busheen, and Jodi and Linzi and two other girls were standing beside them.

"Hi", said Jodi. "Would you and your dog like to come round the house? We've chosen our dream cottage. Rosa and I talked about it so many times when we were young, and now we've done it, and Linzi and Lila are going to share as well."

The athletic- looking girl, apparently Lila, giggled and said, “there’s room for your boyfriend, Linzi, but me and Rosa plan to get boyfriends soon as well, and we might have to make it bigger to fit them all in.”

Jasper felt groggy; he knew there was something he must remember, and he pushed himself to say it correctly. “This is – a fantasy”.

“Oh, come on,” said Linzi, linking her arm through his. “How do you think people get to know one another? Even if they sit up all night talking, there has to be another load of stuff between them that’s unspoken.”

“We won’t remember this”, said Jasper. “We should move up higher and raise our consciousness.” He felt like he was pushing against a wall and slowly being forced backwards into a confused daze.

“That’s just shit,” Linzi said sharply. “What makes us different? All the other couples do it-then when they meet, all the hard slog of making the link is already done.”

“They taught him that in some posh academy, but we’ll show him the girls’ way,” Lila laughed.

“My teacher Beatrice is a girl,” said Jasper.

“The way we do it here,” Lila continued, “is we go out and hunt for the man God intended for us. Linzi’s my best friend- we go out together. The same with Rosa and Jodi.”

“I can’t find Lonnie”, sighed Jodi, “I call him here, but he doesn’t come. It doesn’t matter, though- we’ve already done the talking all night thing.”

For what seemed like an hour on this plane, but was really only a few minutes, Jasper explored the idea of God helping women to find their intended partners. He hadn’t come across anything like churches or temples on Vahan, but the people did speak of what seemed to be a monotheistic God who helped them in various ways. On the Earth of his day religion was dying: the people believed in magic and spirits and no longer went to churches and temples- instead it was magicians like himself who were admired. His teachers at Void Star were very pleased about this, but Jasper wasn’t so sure that the decline in religion was a good thing. He thought it had happened because so many people had died, poisoned by environmental pollution or starved to death.

As he stood deep in thought the environment abruptly changed; the air became darker and the street more pitted, and stony. “Hey!” cried Rosa. “There are monsters coming. Run! We have to get home before they reach us.”

Jasper peered round and saw a flock of vrins approaching; this was a wild animal of Vahan rather like a cross between a fox and a bear and he’d seen a

couple while working on the farm. But these were nightmare ones with distorted features and much thicker, hairier bodies and they were walking upright. For a second Jasper glimpsed Trevik sidling up to them and making a whinnying sound, shoving them in greeting with his hands and snout: he didn't see anything scary about them; he loved them and wanted to play.

Then he lost awareness and plunged deep into a dream which seemed to go on for weeks in which he fought off the vrins and other enemies and took the girls on a long journey home, hiding in buildings and shelters and when they finally got there, sleeping in the cottage with Linzi in a rough Vahan bed with only one cushion.

At the time he truly did get to know the four girls; he registered every detail of their faces and clothes and the decorations they wore, and he talked in depth with them and found out about their personalities. During the course of the dream he made what seemed like vitally important plans for surviving the dangers they encountered. But as he had predicted he remembered nothing the next day, not even the angel.

Somewhere in the dream there had been an angel who talked about the way he had got himself in deeper and deeper through his own actions, simply in pursuit of survival and basic needs. He had thrown himself in with others until there were too many strings and tendrils to undo.

## Chapter 10

After the stress of waiting and keeping quiet it was a relief to Jasper and Lonnie when the troop ship arrived. The men on board wore armour and a blue sash; it was a little different from the armour that Jasper had been wearing when he went on his march because they were not from Ramoon; they came from a country to the west of it known as Paleta. They belonged to a small military unit led by one Commander Brun. Like everyone else who Jasper had seen on Vahan he looked like a western Earth dweller, possibly European, with blue eyes and pale but chiselled features.

He explained that his orders were to pick up the men from Antell Country who were related to the kidnapped women and add them to his unit, to join the attack on the new city being built in Jalop by the Ramoonians. He didn't mention the Zarens, and it appeared he hadn't been told that there were aliens involved; he knew only that the city must be eliminated because the Ramoonians intended it as the centre of an empire, and the world would be destabilized by their plans to conquer as many other kingdoms as they could. That was the main military objective, and the second was to rescue the women prisoners if it was at all possible.

"We would be more than willing to free them on your behalf and bring them back to you," he told the assembled villagers. "But this is where my orders become a little strange. Apparently it is important that the women's kinsfolk should join us and should attack with blind rage, because that will make a difference to the outcome. I can't say I've ever heard anything like it, but the order comes directly from our King."

The men of Busheen were only too pleased to see something practical being done about the problem at last, and they pushed Lonnie and his father forward and declared they would look after their trading interests while they were away. Jasper immediately volunteered to go as well as he was staying with the family, and so did Barra. Some of the men from the outlying areas were already on board; they only had a few more stops to make, and they would be flying to the battle zone that night.

The men were encouraged to bring whatever weapons they had, whether fire sticks or something more basic, although Commander Brun did draw the line at the pids and issued the labourers with lances instead. Jasper showed him his Combat Unlock moves and he approved of that and said he would give Jasper the task of making surprise attacks on the guards using hand to hand combat.



Jasper didn't like the idea of using Combat Unlock to kill, especially guards who probably had no idea what they were caught up in, and of course if they were men of Ramoon they would be his former comrades who he had led on the march when he was in the persona of the knight. But after all it was no different from the wars on Earth which countless generations of young men had become involved in, and women too in recent times.

He recalled his observations of the women here on Vahan: how passive they were, like Earth women of earlier centuries. The Busheen women had spent the last few months confined to their houses without the slightest protest. It would be very interesting to see how the planet developed and whether or not that would change. But he was never going to see it, because provided that he survived he was going home. He hoped there would be a fling with Linzi first, if she agreed, and he would have liked it to be long-term, but that couldn't be.

If time was running at the same pace on Earth as it was on Vahan, his parents and his two younger sisters Helena and Cerise must be feeling as bereft as Jodi's family at his unexplained disappearance. Ironically they might even be saying he had been abducted by aliens without really believing it. He wanted to look in Emin's scrying mirror to see what they were doing, and wished he had thought of that when he was on The Retreat. Now it might be too late; he might be killed, and never see them again.

Perhaps his parents would blame the training school and there would be trouble. The teachers at Void Star had always known there were some risks in the procedures they taught. Beatrice used to say that if anything happened to one of her young students she would never lie about it: she would rather risk the school being closed down than lie like a politician. It would probably take a lot for them to be actually closed, with 'magician' having become such a respectable occupation.

Jalop was six hours away by ship: about half the time of a journey to The Retreat, and one half-hour stretch of the journey was through space, in order to travel faster. Lonnie and his father and Jasper went home and gathered some clothes and possessions and put them in leather bags with strings. Lonnie's father gave Jasper a spare fire stick and he put it in his belt, but he wasn't sure he would be very accurate with one. They had to be loaded with oil capsules to provide fuel. Jasper felt sorry for Lonnie's mother, who said little apart from wishing them a safe return and sat resignedly by the oil heater, it being a cool evening. Before they left Jasper took his shoulder patch out of the drawer and put it on for the first time, turning it over blank side up so that the inscription about Trevik eating vegetation

was hidden. Lonnie hugged him and said, “you’re one of us now. We’ll save Jodi and the rest of the world too.”

Although time was short Jasper made sure of fitting in a protective spell before they left, to deflect harm from himself, Lonnie and his father and Barra in the coming battle. He placed them within an astral chaos wheel with a pentagram at the centre and his own protective sigils arrayed around the circumference. He could feel the energy in it pulsing around them, creating ripples that flowed out into the ether, up to the astral plane.

Jodi was up there, flying next to the raven. She felt as though she was covering mile after mile, the landscape spread out below her like a shoulder patch design, but she knew her physical self was trapped in one place: a half-built city that she had no desire to live in when it was finished.

“I went out in the garden yesterday”, she told the raven. “I got all the way to the gate before the guard stopped me. There was a fog around the perimeter which confused me; it made me feel I didn’t want to leave after all, but then I got angry, and the fog dispersed. I don’t think the other girls can see it.”

“We know about that already, Jo,” said the raven. He delighted in using his own nickname for her. “Tell me something we don’t know.”

Jodi hesitated. She wanted to swoop down in a curve over the land and see whether she could do it as smoothly as the bird, and that dimmed her concentration on his questions. “Well, I...we...we’re going to be screened,” she said. “I don’t know what they mean, but they’re going to pick two girls and move them somewhere for an experiment.”

“Who? Who are they moving?”

“We won’t know till afterwards...” she swooped down, using up a lot of psychic energy and breaking contact with the raven, but at that moment escapism seemed the best thing in the world.

Soon after that, Emin was struggling to maintain communication with Jasper. Jasper appeared to be crying like a child. “If the Zarens experiment on Jodi or Linzi I shall die.”

“Jasper, get a grip. If the girls are split up you will need to know about it and to tell your military unit. You’re a seer- you’re not a normal soldier.”

It was news to Emin that Jasper had a connection with two of the girls; all he had seen were the bonds that tied him to Lonnie and Trevik, and he couldn’t even tell Jasper about that. In his present emotional state none of the information would go through.

## Chapter 11

The men from Antell Country boarded the troop ship, and Commander Brun began by briefing them about the other fighting forces they would be joining up with. It sounded like there would be two other armies, one from Paleta and the other from another of the countries close to Jalop, who could be identified by the paler blue sashes they would be wearing. Their unit would be included in the Paletian contingent and would be issued with as much armour as could be spared which was a little less than the full quota, but the Paletians would try to deploy them further back, apart from Jasper who was going to take care of the Ramoonian guards on the city wall. He would only be wearing a few protective panels so that he would be able to use Combat Unlock.

Most of the men tried to get some sleep on the journey because they were going to a different time zone; when they arrived it would be early evening. The troop ships had padded areas on the floor like built-in sleeping bags. Jasper managed to sleep for a few hours, and during the half hour stretch when they went through space he was aware of Trevik exclaiming, "Not again!" and clinging onto his knees. The other dream, in which Emin had spoken to him, he didn't remember.

As they flew over Jalop they saw that it was a country of lush vegetation, with huge dark green plants like giant dock weeds and trees of many shapes and sizes all with thick, wide trunks. The towns were massed areas of dust and stone buildings clustered around market squares, and they stood together in groups.

Jasper was pleased to help with setting up the camp and actually to know what he was doing this time, for the instructors explained everything clearly. He did think the Antell Country men looked a bit like a rabble of peasants compared with the other two professional armies, even after they had dressed in the protective armour and dark blue sashes. The gear that Jasper put on himself was more like cricket pads than armour and it felt lumpy and strange, but it was exactly what he needed in order to move freely.

The camp was well hidden but near enough to the former capital city to give them a clear view of it on a slope behind the trees, ravaged and largely destroyed and with many scaffoldings that had gone up on the shattered buildings to transform them. The troops were ordered to attack at nightfall and burn the city to the ground with their fire sticks.

As the sun was setting the division leaders began to hand out a herb and ordered the men to take it. "To help with that blind rage," they said. Jasper recalled

from his history lessons that something similar to this had been tried during twentieth century warfare on Earth, and it had not gone well. He looked at the herb dubiously and said, "I need a clear head if I'm to use Combat Unlock."

"Come on, it's orders," said Commander Brun.

"Whose orders?" Jasper asked.

"That's not something you need to know, but as I believe in giving my men a civil reply I'll point him out. That's our advisor over there, on the slope. Now, take it."

Jasper ate a small piece, and quickly crumbled most of it and dropped it. Then he looked over to where the commander was pointing. He recognised that armour and sword; the features were unfamiliar, but of course when they were his, he hadn't been able to see his own face.

He was still afraid of exploding or imploding if he stood next to Emin, but he couldn't miss the opportunity. He realised what a warm affection he felt, almost as if Emin really was his master.

When no-one was looking he slipped over and said with a grin, "Hey! Your drug better not ruin my moves."

Emin's eyes twinkled. "Jasper!" he whispered. "I can only speak to you for five minutes; I have to go back to the city. The Zarens think I'm on their side."

"How will you manage?"

"By forgetting how to use everything except my sword. Then you will win. But listen- I have to tell you some things quickly. First, two of the women may have been moved from the house where they're keeping them. Watch out for that. And something else: you can't go back to Earth until I or another wizard manages to undo your servitor spell. Not unless you take both your servitor and Lonnie with you. Otherwise you'll die. Now, I must go back. Goodbye, and be safe In the fighting." He strode away, got onto a horse and rode back to the city.

It's hard to get ready for battle when you are feeling stunned, and drugged too because although Jasper had only eaten very little of the herb it worked more strongly on him than on the natives of Vahan. At first he thought he would have to kill Trevik; a regrettable decision when Trevik seemed to be sentient and loving, but after all magicians would often kill a servitor after it had served its purpose, either by dissolving or reabsorbing it. Then it sunk in that Emin had said Lonnie too. "I feel like killing everyone, so I might as well kill Lonnie. Kill him right now; then I'll be able to get home."

Jasper veered around looking for Lonnie, his mind full of stabbing dark lines like slanting rain. He felt like a Berserker, everything gone except the hot rage and the target. With Combat Unlock he could take out anyone he liked, and they would be

unable to resist him. He could claim both Jodi and Linzi, keep them as sex slaves for a while and then, if he felt like it, transport them back to Earth.

A man swam into his vision a few metres away, wearing a dark blue sash and checking his fire stick. But that was the wrong man, it was Barra. He might defend Lonnie, but then he would have to go too. Where was Lonnie? He saw him in the distance near a larger group of soldiers and began to head that way.

Just as he drew near to Lonnie the effects of the drug faded: the tiny pinch he had taken was used up. "What was I doing? That wasn't me, it was Emin's drug talking. He must be fallible after all if he thought that would help. Of course I wouldn't kill Lonnie or Barra- but I could drag Lonnie through the time portal to Earth, away from Jodi and everyone else he knows." Just then the generals gave the order to attack.

As they marched on the half- built city Jasper closed his eyes and began to go through the mental sequence for Combat Unlock for when you are about to use it in reality; when you're not just practising. He managed to do it correctly; however he still felt a few random pangs of the murderous rage caused by the drug, and disjointed mental images were intermingled with it.

He saw a picture from his past. At the age of seven Jasper was playing with Tom: they had been watching old martial arts films and copying the moves. They weren't going to follow through. They tackled one another lightly and half-heartedly, and rolled in the heather. Then somehow Tom was gone- he must have run back indoors. But Jasper didn't notice he was alone, so intense was his concentration. He stretched up his arms to the sky and held them still for several moments, and steadied his legs in a combat- ready pose.

He also didn't see the bird-like faces watching him from a corner of the garden. They nodded approval, then turned the time travel notches on their ship forward fourteen years to survey him again. But they didn't know what they were doing; they must have thought he would be the equivalent of a black belt by then. They might as well have counted the blue sashes the men around him were wearing as meaning that.

Jasper's mind returned to the present. They had reached the city and were about to start killing the guards. He was relieved that the drug had completely worn off now and he could do it because it was a military necessity rather than because he wanted to murder everyone in sight. Every guard he approached was flummoxed - they had clearly never come across a martial art before, and Jasper seemed to fly and to hit them in vulnerable places that they never knew they had. He was very successful, and they stormed through the gates and into the city.

The rest of his unit had eaten the whole of the herb, and they screamed and killed the Ramoonians they encountered by brute force, and set fire to all the buildings and scaffoldings they passed with their fire sticks. All the other divisions were doing the same.

Jasper kept thinking the twelve girls would all be killed, and it was putting him off searching for the enemy. Even in the clear air of Vahan the smoke was growing dangerously thick above the streets. He tried to find Commander Brun who had seemed so reasonable before, but might now be high and crazy like all the others. At last he found him amid all the confusion, and at once he could see from his eyes that he too had only taken a little. Perhaps that had been the orders for all the commanders.

"Sir, where are the prisoners?" Jasper shouted. "They'll be burned!"

"There!" He indicated a house in the distance, which was quite conspicuous in the firelight as it had less scaffolding on it than the others. "Our second objective. Wait!" He turned his attention back to the enemy, whose numbers were rapidly increasing now that the builders, who were all armed with lances or swords, had joined in.

Jasper dodged the blows and quickly got out his fire stick, shooting fire in their direction as the others were doing. "The prisoners may not all be in the house!" he shouted across to Commander Brun.

"That's the only one on my map."

He thought of Jodi and Linzi getting burned up in some other house. This could be happening in a war on Earth- wherever you go in the universe it's the same instinctive behaviour, the same horror. Maybe that's why their tarot cards were the same. All he could do was check the buildings before he burned them- but the others weren't checking, they were drugged and crazed.

They smashed and burned their way in the direction of the original house, and it seemed to take a long time even though the Ramoonians were outnumbered by the attackers. Every building as far as the eye could see had been set on fire, and there was no doubt that they had achieved their aim of destroying the city; they could simply leave the fires to spread and do the rest of the work for them by the time morning came.

When they finally got to the house where the girls had been imprisoned the Zarens appeared at last: about twenty-five of the creatures standing in the street nearby. Jasper wondered why they were so near it; were they using the prisoners as a shield? Their ships were here as well. One was sitting at the end of the street and the rest of them formed a fleet stationed in the farthest of three fields that lay

behind the house. They were sleek vessels shaped and coloured like dolphins which stood out against the flames.

Despite their frenzy the men noticed the Zarens, and with expressions of horror on their faces they began shouting to one another about monsters. The commanders called for silence, and had to go on calling for a long time before it was quiet enough to hear a single person speak. Then the Paletian general walked towards the Zarens and said, "we wish to negotiate."

The leader of the Zarens, the same one that had spoken to Emin when he met with them, came forward and said acidly, "Negotiate about what? I don't understand what you people want and why you've destroyed all our hard work. We were building this for your benefit. It's a pity our defences aren't finished, but our champion can attack as well as defend. Knight Laurel! Prepare to attack."

Jasper realised that Emin in his guise of the knight had been standing with them the whole time, though hidden in the centre of the group. He raised the sword, which shone brilliantly this time with firelight, and pronounced, "I am ready to destroy them."

Jasper studied his expression, and for a moment he despaired. Emin's acting was too good- could it be he really was on the Zarens' side after all?

The general made a point of turning to look at Emin, then turning back and trying again to negotiate. "We ask that you free the prisoners you are holding in that building."

"Oh, I see," said the alien leader. "It's all about that little group of whores? I'll never understand you people. I'll just kill them- then you'll have nothing to fight about."

He pulled out a remote control which he'd been carrying somewhere on his body, and pressed some buttons. A weapon like a torpedo emerged from the top of the largest ship in the fleet. It sailed across the sky towards the house.

Emin lifted his free arm casually, and stretched it out towards the sky. The torpedo stopped in mid-air, moved backwards and fell onto the fleet of ships, blowing all of them up. Suddenly the Zarens had drawn some type of guns, and the one nearest to Emin shot him dead.

Then, from the other side to the left of the house, a third army with red sashes charged in and threw themselves on the Zarens. There was no time to think or feel; everyone began fighting again. There were a lot of casualties among the humans because the Zarens had superior weapons, but there were only twenty-five of them and hundreds of humans, and slowly the humans began to overcome them.

Jasper was using the fire stick again. He didn't have to bother about the fiddly oil capsules for reloading because he had started using it later than the others, and he mixed in jumps from Combat Unlock to keep out of the line of fire. His unit soon fought their way right up to the house.

"Torch that ship in the street!" ordered Commander Brun. "We don't want any of them left."

Jasper became aware of something next to him- it was Emin's raven, transparent, the way Trevik usually looked to him when he wasn't asleep. He heard the voice, ringing and metallic. "I've found the two girls Jo told me about- they are in there. The Zarens put them there for a breeding programme."

Not burned then, but they were about to be, and it could still be Jodi and Linzi. "Sir!" Jasper called out to Commander Brun.

"Not now. We're about to burn this ship."

"But, Sir! Please!" Jasper caught hold of his arm. "Two of the women are in it. I know- I'm a wizard. Like that one up there who the aliens called their champion."

"You'd better be right," he said. "Who wants to board it?"

The drug had worn off now and the men were afraid to go on the ship, so Jasper went on it holding up his fire stick in case there were any Zarens on board. But all he found were two very frightened women, both of them looking ill. And thank God, the God the Vahan people spoke of, they weren't Jodi or Linzi. But one of them was Rosa, who Jasper vaguely remembered from his dreams. Two of their kinsmen led them away to take them to the transport ships while the rest of them continued to the house.

"Pity you're going back to Antell," Commander Brun said to Jasper. "I'd like a wizard in my unit, and you do brilliant stealth attacks as well."

At last they entered the house, and the other ten girls were hiding in what looked like a half-finished shower room. Jasper recognised Jodi and Linzi as soon as he saw them, but he concentrated on treating all the girls equally, reassuring them and getting them out safely. They took them away from the city and headed towards the ship in which they had travelled to Jalop.

Barra was leading Jodi, and Jasper had seen Lonnie's father five minutes ago, but Lonnie was nowhere to be seen. Jasper felt terrible about what he'd been thinking after he took the drug. His protective spell was supposed to work on all of them and he hoped he hadn't done anything to damage it.

He went over to Jodi and said, "I know that you're Jodi. Your partner described you to me. He's here, fighting for you, and I'm going to go back and find him."

Jodi gasped. "I wish he wasn't here- he could be dead!" she said.



“Now, keep calm,” Barra reassured her. “We don’t know anything yet. Just keep walking till we get you to safety.”

Jasper turned back towards the burning city. The smoke was dense now and was starting to sting his throat and eyes. But Lonnie met him on the way.

“It’s over”, he said. “There were too many of us for them.”

## Chapter 12

On the troop ship the girls sat with their families who had come to rescue them. Linzi seemed to be alone. Jasper moved closer to her; he wasn't sure he could speak to her, but then he did- he looked into her eyes and asked, "do you remember dreaming about me?"

"Yes, I do," she replied at once.

"What do you remember?"

"We were making love, mostly."

A couple of the other girls laughed- they were sitting close enough to hear, and Jasper didn't know what to say next. But Linzi leaned forward, took his hand and said, "Stupid! You want to ask if I would do it in real life. Of course I would!"

"The first day I dreamed about you I was going to a dance. I would have met you there if you hadn't been kidnapped." He was afraid he sounded like one of the old village women, believing in fate.

"Any way of meeting is good," Linzi said.

Later one of the men gave Jasper an envelope. After the battle the soldiers had found a letter on Emin's body marked, 'To Jasper, if I die.' It read:

'Jasper, with greetings and love from Emin.

If I do not return from this campaign, I want you to know that these last few months have been a wonderful experience and have made me truly happy. I have always wanted to be just once in the shoes of those people who I help, and experience life as they do. Now I feel fulfilled, and I am ready to move on to whatever comes next.

We cannot help being mortal, but while I live I have used my magic power in any way that I wish. That is my only religion.'

A few weeks later in Antell Country Jasper was sitting outside in the fields; he was supposed to be meditating, and a great deal of meditation was needed to assimilate the lessons learned from his experiences in Jalop. However, he couldn't concentrate. All he could think was: "did I have to come all the way to another world to be this happy?"

Linzi did live alone; she was a free spirit who liked to be out in the countryside, and shortly after their return from Jalop Jasper had moved in with her in the cottage outside Arfield. He was still intending to go back to Earth eventually- he just needed

to find another wizard like Emin who could help with untangling Lonnie and could open a time vortex; then perhaps he could go home and take Linzi with him. But he didn't tell her about Earth; there was no point unless the trip was viable, and in the meantime he got a job on a farm in Arfield. It was easy to do; they needed workers and were taking people on.

Jasper began to enquire about magical lodges on Vahan. Emin had talked about his own training which must have happened somewhere. But it wasn't straightforward to find them with the people being so reluctant to use any form of mass media, and his two servitors were not much use for that either. He had decided to keep Trevik because Jodi could see him and loved him, and he also had the raven that he had inherited from Emin.

"The location of magical lodges is secret," said the raven. "It's against my basic instructions to reveal them. Do you want to change my instructions?"

Jasper was prepared to go on a quest; however Linzi said he couldn't go travelling around looking for lodges now because their friend Rosa needed them. The Antell Country doctors had managed to cure the other girl who was ill from taking part in the breeding experiment, but Rosa was actually pregnant and was getting steadily worse.

If only Emin had been there to advise them. The Vahan doctors believed it wasn't ethical to terminate, and Jasper dreaded the thought of an alien hybrid causing trouble on Vahan. In the end, mercifully, she died. But by then Linzi was pregnant as well and he had family responsibilities.

Jasper asked Lonnie to travel up to The Retreat and fetch Emin's black scrying mirror. He was confident that he could make one of his own for viewing static visions, but not one like Emin's which showed moving pictures. The first thing he did when he got it was to take it to a secluded place and ask to see images of his family back on Earth.

"I'll be delighted to show you a scene in which your family talked about you," said the little demon. "Especially as they said something bad."

A picture appeared in the mirror of Jasper's mother and sister Cerise; they were at a social evening hosted by one of the parents at Cerise's school. "He was never really one of us," Jasper's mother complained. "Our way of life wasn't good enough for him. Now he's fallen into a black hole, and that's the end of him. The whole name of that academy means a black hole- no wonder it happened. I wanted to sue, but the lawyers wouldn't take the case. Everyone admires those people too much."

“I really missed him at first,” added Cerise. “But maybe it’s for the best; after all, he never wanted to join in with the rest of us.”

They were wrong about the name: Void Star doesn’t mean a black hole. The meaning is closer to the sphere of Daath on the Tree of Life, or alternatively the chaos void before the cosmos emerged from it. They were also wrong that Jasper didn’t want to be part of their family. He had always believed that by training as a wizard he would be more a part of them than he had ever been before. He wanted to knock on their door and tell them so in person.

The mirror showed Jasper where the magical lodges on Vahan were; they were few in number, and in obscure places. But when he contacted them he found that none of them had any adepts who even approached Emin’s level. Emin must have attained it through his own explorations. That is the ideal in chaos magic: to be self-reliant, not dependent on gods or powers, because it is man who makes the gods. A few radiant souls are able to do this, but most are like Jasper and need support and instruction from those who have gone before. Without it he had no idea how to pull a physical time vortex near to him and pass through it, and he also didn’t want to drag Lonnie to Earth. He wasn’t willing to make a pact with the demon in his mirror, nor any other demon, because then he would lose the freedom to make his own decisions. There weren’t any further options.

So Emin became a legend and The Retreat a shrine to his memory, while Jasper and Linzi and their children lived out the rest of their lives on Vahan.

## Other eBooks By Candy Ray

All available as free eBooks.

### Short Story Collections

#### Chaos Dreams Part 1

These short stories were channelled by Candy Ray from a non-human chaos muse called Ino. Each one creates a vivid and enchanting world, sometimes in the past. Some of the stories have a narrative style that roves around observing. The tales are a showcase for Ino's unique views about human beings; her observation of people is very sharp, yet with a motherly quality.

#### Chaos Dreams part 2: Astral Tales

The common theme in this collection of Candy Ray's short stories is the astral plane, which is both the realm of the dead and the plane of dreams. In each story the action focuses on a different aspect of this plane: mediumship, lucid dreams, life after death, visionary alchemical experience and esoteric magic. Dive deep into these other worlds and you will find that they intersect with your own.

#### Chaos dreams Part 3: Fruition

This is a compilation of three chaos magic stories. The first one 'Eoss and Bidskimmer' was part of an ambitious servitor project, which was carried out by chaos magicians in an online group. It is about a servitor and an egregore who make life much better for a group of young people.

The second one 'Arcana' is a hypersigil, a chaos magic spell, and it is the story of a lady chaos magician and game designer, her cute servitor, tarot cards, an angel and a demon.

The third one 'Beads Falling, Falling Into A Design' was channelled from Ino, and the main character is based partly on herself. This story is narrated by a spirit from the mineral kingdom who finds herself within a bead in a ladies' necklace, and through this becomes closely involved with a human family.

## Chaotic Dreams

Five short stories of surreal and slightly dark fantasy. An ancient legend meanders into strange directions. An inner demon seems to depart- but has he really gone? Alchemical fantasies sweep one man's world into disarray. A living doll yearns to escape. Trading in crystals leads to an unexpected magical drama. Last two stories channelled from Ino.

## Novellas

Copying A Master (channelled from Ino).

Maurice, an idealistic painter, is pulled into an art fraud against his will. It is the 1950's, the time when Austin Spare was alive, and the premise of this book is that artists had already been painting magical sigils for millennia. So Maurice seeks a solution to his problem through a sigil spell. Meanwhile the crisis of the fraud uproots him, wrecks his domestic life and drags him across three European countries as he flees the revenge he fears.

The Rescue Circle

A magician undertakes a dangerous quest to become a psychopomp, a guide of the dead, and afterwards to find his true love who has gone hitchhiking without him. During his trance he encounters angels, gods, djinn and troubled souls, and joins a rescue circle of Spiritualists who are more advanced than he is.

## Novellas under the pen name Lena Chere

The Eoss Trilogy

1. Platara Mountain: (Paperback: only available from the publisher)

Imagine magicians of the modern-day internet becoming involved with a parallel world where human beings are still in the Stone Age. Imagine this involvement precipitated by a kind but much-feared Horse Goddess who was created on Facebook.

Alexandra has just left school and is looking for love and a vocation in life when that scenario becomes her reality. She comes to care deeply about both the Horse

Goddess and a young family in the parallel world; it dramatically reveals her past and changes her future, transforming her into a magician.

## 2. Mount Clexa: (Self -published, paperback and eBook)

This is a book of serious occult fiction told in the first person by Clexa, the daughter of the Horse Goddess Eoss.

Bound to a magician in service, she finds herself forced to explore the aethyrs of the Enochian magic system with him, and to carry out a revenge curse on a girl when she would prefer to spare her.

Clexa thinks for herself about how to interact with the human beings she meets and also the aethyr guardians, and this results in her being chased and harried across the inner realms, so that she has to evolve much faster than she anticipated.

## 3. Silver Manes: (Self -published, paperback and eBook)

Arran is a Kabbalist, a young professional man from the UK, and his accident comes at a critical moment in his love life. It also serves to deepen his emerging connection with one of the kingdoms of Hell.

He enters into an extended coma, which becomes a test of character both for himself and for his secret enemy, Jez. As Arran learns lessons about love and about the phenomenon of archetypes, many of the people around him get the opportunity to petition a Wishing Horse for three wishes- or for anything else they want.

## Non-Fiction

### Alchemical Journey: (Autobiography)

Now available as an eBook, Candy Ray's popular account of her six past lives, and the times in between them. She has been a demon, a warrior in ancient India, a sacred cat in the time of Moses, a scholar in Medieval England, a witch during the English Civil War and a Quaker in the era of slavery.

The account is a concise summary of many events covering the past five thousand years. It focuses on how the Law of Karma works, and gives insights into some important world events. This edition has added end notes which give more details about consequences in the present day.