



Weun Academy
The Shadow Maker

By

Michael J. Zummo





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WEUN ACADEMY: THE SHADOW MAKER

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This book is dedicated to my friends
Susie Lavender and Kathleen Jenks-Grobbsen.

Your passion to bring your favorite story worlds to life is both a
joy to be a part of and inspiring.

While creating Weun Academy, I've found myself challenging its
very tenets, making sure people had ways to bring this fictional
universe into their reality. This could be through the recreating of the
outfits, or aliens, the places visited, foods eaten, technologies used, or
imagining which superpowers someone had.

Thank you for all your love and support. I hope Weun Academy
inspires others the way you have me! ^.^

Author's Note

Weun Academy. Eisah's story! When I began writing the *D'mok Revival* series, I never imagined how vast this literary universe would become—nor did I expect to launch a spin-off. But here we are!

Eisah and his mother appeared multiple times in the original four novels. Now they get to take the lead. If this is your first time reading anything in the *D'mok Revival* universe, don't worry—you don't need to know anything beforehand. Everything important is right here. You'll experience and understand the world alongside Eisah and his mother, sharing in their insights and revelations one moment at a time.

This book holds deep personal meaning for me because of the serious subject matter. School violence continues to affect communities across the U.S.—and my own family went through it, too. Over the course of my son's K–12 education, his school experienced three incidents. The most serious happened during his senior year.

While this story doesn't dwell on the event itself, it explores the emotional and practical journey of rebuilding in its aftermath. I've included some of the recovery strategies that helped us, hoping they might offer comfort—or even a starting point—for others facing something similar.

At its heart, though, this is a story of growth, discovery, and finding strength in unexpected places. I can't wait for you to meet Eisah and explore this new corner of my literary universe.

Without further ado, allow me to take you on a journey.

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CHAPTER 1

Eisah

“We’re gonna be heroes!” The manic prattle echoed down the corridor of glass and banded metal, along with the footfalls of a rampaging horde. Another snarled, “You’re dead, Earthers!”

Eisah didn’t look back. He and Keenen just kept running. This wasn’t the first time Rabis and his gang took chase, but this felt different. The predatory gleam in Rabis’s eyes, his almost feral grin, and the sense of menace and hunger pouring off the others sent Eisah’s instincts into a frenzy.

He gritted his teeth; every fiber in his body burned with exhaustion. He couldn’t run forever, and they were closing the gap between them fast. But after fifteen years of Martian living, Eisah had the advantage. The Redborn, native Martians, rarely strayed from their part of the colony, and he knew the domes and tubes of Dao Vallis better than any Mars-born native. A shortcut ahead would get him and Keenen into Earther territory before the Redborn could catch up.

Still, he had to focus. The worst dust storm in a century raged an arm’s length away, stayed only by the tube’s thick, transparent walls. Swallowing the structure whole, a vortex of Martian dirt and debris transformed his path into a demonic maw. The swarm’s constant rotation inflicted a vertigo that made the ground appear to tilt. Natural sunlight had

been choked to a murky yellow, and only a few of the tube lamps actually worked in this area. The combination cast disorienting patterns of light and shadow everywhere, making the precision of each step matter.

A tall, gangly waif cried out as he fumbled beside Eisah. Arms flailing, the boy nearly tripped them both.

“Careful!” Eisah’s voice cracked in panic.

Keenen was a klutz under normal circumstances, deadly in this one. Most tubes were well maintained, but not these. Littered from transients and left abandoned by disinterested maintenance crews, the Martian boondocks had become a gauntlet of danger and disrepair. Right now, it was their only path to safety.

Keenen looked over, hazel eyes wide with fear, cheeks flushed against his otherwise stark-white complexion. Breathless, he choked out, “Not ... gonna make it—”

“We will!” Eisah barked. But he knew the truth. If Keenen fell, he wouldn’t last a minute against Rabis and his gang. They had one option: stay on their feet and run.

If they made it to the habitat’s emergency doors, they could rush through and seal them shut, cutting off the Redborn. *Just a bit farther.*

“I have a plan.”

Keenen panted, “The others ... are okay?”

Eisah glanced back and counted their pursuers. Seven. Originally there were nine. Only two Redborn went after the others? If the pair actually caught his friends, the Redborn would be the ones in trouble. “They’ll be fine,” Eisah said.

If he’d learned anything from their previous encounters, the Redborn weren’t especially threatening apart, but did damage in groups. The seven closing in were scary, even for him. But no matter what, he’d keep Keenen safe. No one got hurt on his watch.

His breathing more erratic, Keenen huffed, “I can’t ... anymo—”

“Keep pushing!”

Why did Rabis do it? For the first time, the Redborn had outright attacked Earthers. The delicate balance keeping peace between the factions was gone. Everyone’s lives, Redborn and Earther, were about to change. The colony would never be the same.

From behind, Rabis screamed, “You’re gonna be the example to all

Earther-kind!”

The world fell into slow motion as Eisah noticed Keenen stumble and flounder forward. Cold fear gripped him. In a moment, the boy would be tumbling across the ground. The Redborn would be on them.

A tingle shot through him as his entire being tuned to one task: saving his friend. Eisah reached out and grabbed a fistful of Keenen’s bulky shirt, then jerked upward. To his surprise, the boy lifted with unexpected ease and sailed forward. He gasped, “Thanks!” in relief as he found his footing and continued.

Pointing to the intersection ahead, Eisah yelled, “That way!”

They cut into the connecting corridor, then skidded up to a mountain of crates.

“Oh god,” Eisah snarled. A fresh supply run must have arrived from Earth—a big one, given it filled the tube this far back. Though, it wasn’t a solid wall; he spotted gaps. “Find a way through!” he said, shoving Keenen over a nearby waist-high stack, then following behind.

Something whizzed past his ear, exploding the edge of the nearest crate in a bloom of splinters. Light glinted off a metal object lodged in the container ahead. The object looked like a disk of three overlapping blades. *Throwing stars?* The mark of the Redborn, Rabis’s gang. Eisah had avoided seeing them up close, until now. He noticed a green liquid drip from the bladed edges. The wood touched by the substance turned black before Eisah’s eyes. Acid? Some toxin? Whatever it was, he didn’t want it on his skin.

Growing closer, Rabis shrilled with unbridled exuberance, “Wait till they see this on the news!”

“Are they really trying to kill us?” Keenen cried.

“We’re not finding out!” Eisah said, giving him another shove. Thanks to his long limbs, Keenen bounded over and around the stacks. For once his lanky form provided an advantage. The pair methodically worked their way through, ducking and weaving toward the bulky metal emergency doors.

“Nearly there!” Eisah said, trying to keep his friend’s eyes forward, distracting him from the fact that the Redborn were mastering the gaps. More throwing stars whizzed past, each hitting closer than the one before. Hoping to further complicate the pursuit, he shoved over a few stacks of

nearby crates, toppling them in the Redborns' direction.

A few more hops and he and Keenen would reach the security doors. Eisah spotted the oversized emergency button that would trigger them. "There! Punch that!"

Another throwing star flew past, just missing his ear and striking a crate beside Keenen's face. With a loud crack, the crate's corner disintegrated into a hail of wood fragments. The boy clutched his face, a piercing shriek escaping his lips as he crashed across the crates before him. Eisah looked in horror at the river of red on his friend's fingers.

The Redborn bellowed in triumph behind them. A crushing sense of failure overwhelmed Eisah. The sound of glass shattering drew his gaze. Another throwing star had struck the emergency button beside the door. An overly cheerful voice announced, "Containment doors activated."

Flashing red and yellow emergency lights danced in strips across the ceiling, converging on the doors. In moments they would seal shut. If they couldn't make it through in time, rather than ensuring their escape, the intended safety mechanism would be their death sentence.

Panic filled him. He never seriously thought the Redborn would catch them. His mother's face graced his thoughts. If this was it for him, what would happen to her? She was a strong woman who'd braved Mars and raised him alone. Everything she did was for him. Losing him could destroy her. And what about Keenen's family? He cursed his carelessness.

The grinding of large gears reverberated around him as the heavy metal doors began to close.

Two more throwing stars struck beside Keenen, who still pawed madly at his face. Eisah shrieked, "No! No!"

Scampering over the crates, toward the door, he grabbed Keenen and dragged him along. But the doors were closing too quickly. He could run through and make it by himself, but leaving Keenen wasn't an option.

Then inspiration struck, followed by an electric surge across his body. "Sorry buddy," he said, gripped Keenan's arm and side, and heaved. Tossed like a doll, Keenen crashed to safety.

Eisah felt a meaty *thunk* as a throwing star embedded into his arm, followed by searing pain. Stifling a cry, he watched Keenen disappear behind the emergency doors. Then silence. For a solitary moment no alarm blared, no giant metal doors ground shut, no pursuers taunted. His friend

was safe. Another jolt of pain restored the chaos.

Now he had to contend with Rabis and the other Redborn. A confused mix of pain and strength throbbed through him. He noticed everything around him beginning to glow. Before he could even consider why or where it was coming from, another throwing star sliced into his left shoulder. Tendrils of agony shot through every part of his body.

Overwhelmed by pain, he collapsed to his knees. A surge of scorching heat enveloped him, and his world dissolved into a blinding light.



CHAPTER 2

Awakening

Melodic chimes and the gentle breeze that moved them stirred Eisah's senses. Eyes still closed, he allowed himself to bask in an unexpected moment of joy. Something about it connected with his earliest memories. His mind conjured an image of being swaddled by a field of tall, swaying grasses on a perfect, sun-kissed day.

Expectant jade-green eyes fluttered open to find a boundless, inky void, peppered by sporadic glimmers of twinkling light. A stinging cold leached away the joy of days past, as a profound, unsettling dread gripped him.

Not here. Not now!

Meters away, a flash of golden brilliance shattered the darkness, festering into an ethereal fog. Within, a silhouette emerged—a human figure, a man. His identity obscured by shadows, one unmistakable feature stood out: a Coalition uniform. *He* was back—again.

Eisah's heart pounded with rage. This *thing* served as the very embodiment of Eisah's failures made manifest. Only during his most tormented moments did the man show up. A single snarled word escaped the boy: "You!"

The faceless man slumped into a relaxed posture, smug within his protective glow, arms confidently crossed. Despite the enshrouded face,

Eisah imagined the man sneering.

In frustration, Eisah bellowed, “Go away—it’s what you’re good at!”

The shadowy head tilted, as if amused. Always the same; the man floated there, exuding judgement without saying a word—*ever*. Eisah tried to understand, was this all a twisted game? Did it derive pleasure from inflicting such torment?

It didn’t matter. While he didn’t know the man’s name, he knew the terrible deeds he’d committed. It sickened him. He vowed to never stoop to such depths. He and his mother deserved better. They deserved justice.

A rebuke leapt from Eisah’s mouth. “You’re a monster! Who abandons their family then pops back to take joy in their misery?”

Dark fantasies swirled in his mind. Eisah yearned to hurt this perversion, to beat the smugness out and make the man suffer like they had for all those years. Somehow, he’d make sure the man didn’t get away this time.

An unexpected tingle shot through his hands and feet, a moment before his body flushed with heat. Eisah could feel a strange energy pushing through his skin, discharging into the space around him. Tiny sparks crackled, coalescing into a bright, golden radiance. Panic surged through him, expecting agonizing pain that never came. Instead, he felt an intuitive connection to this power that enveloped him. He felt invincible.

With a cruel grin, Eisah turned his gaze back to the man. *This!* This newfound power would serve his justice. Blind fury consumed him, and with a primal scream, he charged forward in a fit of rage, striking out. But every time Eisah was about to land a blow, the figure contorted unnaturally, narrowly dodging his fists.

The cretin was right in front of him, within Eisah’s reach. All he had to do was land a punch. But he couldn’t. His anger deepened along with a crushing sense of powerlessness.

He channeled his fury-surging energies, fists moving faster and faster. Still the figure expertly evaded every strike. Nothing he did, no matter how hard he tried, seemed to make a difference. It didn’t stop him from swinging.

“I hate you!” Eisah screamed. “Why did you leave us? Why don’t I matter to you? Why do you only come back like this? Answer me!”

You never answer me!

The radiance around his fists flared, turning a menacing crimson. The glow grew more intense, spreading across his body, deepening his confusion and fury.

What is this? What's happening to me?

Answers—that's all he wanted. Eisah shrieked, "What *am* I?"

The figure grabbed his fist, freezing him mid-punch. A deep, resonant voice echoed with a firm, yet tender authority, "You are my son."

In that instant, the universe around Eisah dissolved into a blinding, searing brilliance.



A rhythmic tone pulsed in his ears. Every fiber in his body ached. It felt like twelve-times-standard gravity held him down in place. Exhaustion. He knew it well. His body called him back to sleep, but he resisted. If he could just force through it, open his eyes, it would go away—it always did. He groaned.

"Get the doctor. He's coming to." The words sounded muddy and slurred. He couldn't place the voice.

A high-pitched squeal pierced his ears with pain. Sudden dizziness made the whole room sway.

"Eisah?" a gentle voice said from afar. The squeal slowly faded. Quick steps approached. "Eisah!"

Her sweet voice always made him smile. *Mom.*

"He's smiling! He's smiling!"

"Evelyn, give him a moment," a gravelly baritone said as his heavy steps thudded closer.

He struggled to find his voice. "Mom ..." Its frailness disturbed him.

"Thank God, Eisah!"

He felt the love in her familiar embrace. The scent of roses filled his nostrils, her signature perfume. A sharp pain pierced through his shoulder and forearm. He yelped when his attempt to move them was constrained.

"Oh!" she cried. "Your wound. I'm sorry! So sorry!"

His heavy eyes opened. Everything was blurry, and the light hurt. He couldn't help but squint.

"Too bright?" the man's voice said. "I'll get it."

He'd never felt attacked by light before. Each tiny ray felt like pinpricks piercing through his head. As it dimmed, so did the tension he didn't realize existed until it was gone.

"Better?" the man said.

No longer under siege, he looked around. The fuzziness cleared. He wanted to croak out an affirmation, but only had enough energy to nod.

The first thing he saw were the gray streaks in his mother's hair, far more than he remembered. He was certain he'd contributed to most of them.

Behind his mother stood a man with a full but well-groomed beard and a long white coat in the style of a Martian doctor. He couldn't place the face, but the man's relieved expression made him feel at ease.

Where was he? A thick white curtain hung from the ceiling, creating a partition around his bed. The faint scent of rubbing alcohol floated in the air. Constant beeping came from a device attached to his gurney. *A hospital?* His left arm was heavily bandaged, and still ached from his mother's embrace. Was it broken? Nothing looked out of place with his hands, including the bite marks from his nasty finger-gnawing habit.

"What happened?" he managed.

He felt his mother's mighty hug waver for a moment before she squeezed him tighter.

"I thought I'd lost you," she said. Her words dissolved into a sob.

"There was ..." the man hesitated; his eyes searched the air as if looking for the right words to say. "An accident."

"Accident?" he said, confused.

The man's hand rested on his mother's shoulder. "In the Aegis Habitat ... What do you remember? Anything?"

The Aegis Habitat. Where he and his crew had their hideout, their haven away from the prejudice of native Redborn.

Redborn. Even the word made him tense. It didn't matter that he'd lived most of his life on Mars. The Redborn's prideful arrogance allowed natives to treat others like animals. A face flashed in his mind: his dark-haired nemesis. Rabis.

A cloudy memory came to him. Running. He was running. Rabis was chasing him, along with his gang. Keenen was there too. The vision ran in fast forward until a hail of crate fragments drilled into Keenen's face.

Burning anxiety filled him as clarity returned. He remembered throwing Keenen through the containment doors moments before they closed. “Keenen? Keenen!”

“He’s okay. He’s o-kay,” the man said.

He felt his mother shake with quiet sobs.

The burning within him faded. The last moments of the chase came to him. Light. Everything disappeared into a white light. “What happened?”

“We were hoping you could tell us. Here, one second.” The man disappeared around the hanging curtain wall. A door opened, and his heavy steps faded.

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” his mom said. “They said you wouldn’t make it.”

“I guess I’m hard to kill.” The jest was uncomfortably true. This wasn’t the first time he’d gotten hurt. Though he never woke up in a hospital before—even if there were times he should have. “How long was I out?”

She released her python-like grip and sat up. After wiping her eyes, she took a deep breath, composing herself. “A little over three weeks.”

“Three *weeks*?”

She nodded. “It was pretty bad.” She sniffled and looked away.

“Hey, I’m here. I’m okay.”

A soft laugh escaped her. “Always the optimist.” She looked back, shaking her head gently. But there was something in her eyes—something that said everything wasn’t all right.

“So, who’s the guy?”

“Doctor Lanigan? He ... treats special cases like yours. We’ve spent a lot of time together these past few weeks ...”

The door opened, followed by footsteps. The curtain wall slid aside to show a small group. The sight made him tense again. Instinct drove him backward, despite being in the bed.

“It’s okay,” Doctor Lanigan said. “They’re friends, Eisah.”

Friends? You mean aliens.

He’d only seen news reports before. While Redborn and Earthers accused one another of being aliens, they were both still Human. Actually seeing an alien remained a rare occurrence, much less having them walk

freely among Human colonies.

"I want to introduce you," Lanigan began. "This is Cerna ... actually, *Headmaster* Cerna Hyuzu. She leads a school ..."

Eisah was no longer listening. The statuesque female towered near two and a half meters, garbed in a flowing white robe draped with inlays of cream-colored silks. Her tanned skin was thick yet taut, somewhat leathery in appearance. Perhaps she was ancient? A crown-shaped bone pushed through her long silvery hair. Her demeanor looked soft, but instinct warned this was deceptive, that he should never challenge her to a fight.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," she said. Her soft voice was comforting, almost motherly. He didn't expect that given her great size.

"And Raitr Aruun ..."

Eisah's eyes followed the doctor's motioning hand to the person beside *Headmaster* Hyuzu. This alien looked a few years older than he himself was, maybe early twenties. Despite the silvered skin, he was classically handsome: squared jaw, strong chin, and high cheekbones. Eisah had never seen someone with such scarlet-orange locks. The crew-cut hairstyle looked military. A long black leather sleeve covered his right arm. Something looked off about his hands too. Perhaps artificial?

Doctor Lanigan nodded to another in the group and said, "*Siana d'Otn* ..."

Like Raitr Aruun, *Siana d'Otn*'s skin was silvery, and she appeared around the same age too. Jet-black hair hung straight to her hips. An arch of metal bridged her nose and supported some sort of lenses over her eyes. Even for a non-Human, it gave her a nerdy appearance. Despite her smile, there was an intensity to her gaze that made him uncomfortable.

"And this is Lady Elle."

Mid-to-late twenties. Of the group, this one looked the most Human. He noted tiny, reflective flecks sparsely embedded across her skin, and exotic ruby-colored eyes. A fallen strand of hair drew his gaze to her sophisticated updo style with sculpted curls that rolled down the back of her neck, then to the yellow gems that sparkled from her ears, and the pink ones from a small pendant around her neck. She also wore a cloak he would've sworn was made of crushed, silvery gems.

She was ... stunning. Timid, he said, "Hi."

“Can you tell us what you remember?” Doctor Lanigan nodded to the group to indicate “us.”

Hesitating, Eisah looked at his mom. She nodded. “It’s okay. Go ahead.”

“There’s this guy, Rabis, he leads a gang of Redborn.” He noticed the knowing glance between Doctor Lanigan and his mom. “What?”

“Nothing. Go on,” Lanigan said.

“He attacked me and my friends. We have a place we hang out in the Aegis Habitat.”

“Why there?” the one called Siana asked.

“Because no one goes there, and we can get away from the Redborn for a while. But they came looking for us again. They were on us so fast! Everyone except Keenen and I had time to escape through the air ducts. We had to make a run for it.”

“Through the Dionysian Habitat—toward home?” Lanigan said.

“Yeah, but it was filled with crates. Supplies from Earth maybe. We tried to make our way through. I just wanted to get to the containment doors and stop them from chasing us. But ...” A vision of the crate fragments striking Keenen played in his mind.

Lanigan motioned. “What happened?”

“Keenen got hurt. The doors started closing, and I got him to the other side. But I got trapped. Rabis and the others were closing in.”

His memory fuzzed. A strange sensation crawled across his skin. Crazy, but it was as if his body was trying to remember as well.

“And then?” Headmaster Hyuzu said.

“Everything got hot. And I saw this white light. I thought maybe it was coming from outside. Then ... I don’t remember anything else.”

The others exchanged glances.

“Miss Tanner, may I?” Headmaster Hyuzu said.

His mom nodded. “He needs to know.”

Headmaster Hyuzu gestured, and holographic images projected before her. Dark craters marred the red clay of the Martian ground. The image showed twisted panels of metal and debris strewn about. A great gash appeared in the superstructure leading into the Dionysian Habitat. “There was an explosion,” she said.

“Explosion?” Was that the heat he felt just before blacking out?

"The response team found the bodies of Rabis and the others." Images of the deceased slid out from the scenes of destruction.

"Keenen? Is he—"

"He's fine," his mom said. "The containment doors protected him."

This didn't make sense. If there was an explosion, why wasn't *he* dead? "What caused it? I saw a light. Was there a ship outside or something? Were we attacked?"

"There was no ship, Eisah," Headmaster Hyuzu said. "Was there anything else going on? Tell us about that glow."

He bit back the urge to ask her why she was so interested. "The glow ... it was everywhere—and hot."

"How did you know it was hot?"

"I felt it—everywhere on my body."

In his side vision, he noticed the intensity of Siana's stare growing. *Creepy*.

"Think about that moment, Eisah," Headmaster Hyuzu said. "Was there anything else?"

He remembered the unusual strength, then being struck by the throwing stars, but then shook his head. "No, that's all."

"Did you ever have other times where you felt or saw something similar?"

The dream about his father came to mind—the glow around his hands and body.

"He knows," Siana said in an ominous tone.

"Knows what?" Eisah asked.

Headmaster Hyuzu smiled. It was the type of smile when someone's about to comfort you about something bad, the type that only made him more anxious. She noticed this and said, "You asked why you are alive. Your body radiated a glow that kept you safe while exposed to the Martian environment."

"A glow?"

She paused, met his eyes, and said, "You *know* you're different, don't you?"

"Different how?"

A small laugh escaped her. "They always deflect like that." She stepped closer. "Eisah, let's be honest with one another. We know you can

do things others can't, and I'm not talking about physical or mental aptitude."

Yes, he knew what she meant. But he wasn't about to tell her anything. His mom had seen him do things before, but he'd wanted to understand what was happening better before others found out.

"What did you tell them, Mom?" He spoke with an accusatory tone he didn't intend.

"*She* didn't have to tell us anything," Siana said.

"Siana is a telepath, she can see your thoughts," Headmaster Hyuzu said.

See my thoughts? The staring thing—is that what she was doing?

"Yes, that's what I'm doing," Siana said.

He was dumbstruck. Then realization hit. He looked at his hands. "The flash of light ... I did that? *I* caused the explosion?"

"Yes, Eisah ... you did," the headmaster said, gently.

"I didn't mean to hurt anyone. I was just trying to get away—to get us all to safety."

"Of course you were. We understand that. And the official investigation concluded there was a *critical structural flaw* compromised by the storm that led to the explosion. No one is blaming you for this."

He looked up at her, gauging her sincerity. "So I'm not in trouble?"

"You didn't willfully do anything," Siana said, forcing a smile that failed to reassure.

"But there's a place they'd like to take you," Lanigan said.

"Take me?" He looked at each one in turn. "Where?"

"Weun Academy," Headmaster Hyuzu said.

"What's that?"

"A special place—a school—for people like you—like us. We share a gift known as D'mok abilities. The academy is a place where we can help you discover and understand your talents and learn how to use them."

"I don't want to go anywhere."

His mom's eyes grew teary. "I think you need to, Eisah."

"What? No. I'm not going."

This time her sigh held unshed tears. "You need to understand what's happening with you. You have to learn how to control this ... before ... what if something worse happens?"

"I have this ... I'll figure it out."

"We can help you," Headmaster Hyuzu said.

"No. I'm not leaving. I won't leave her alone." He glanced at his mom, who only glanced down.

Siana leaned over and whispered something to the headmaster, who nodded then said, "I understand your concern. I do. And ... it's important for you to come with us. For your own safety—and the safety of others."

They weren't listening. He didn't intend to go anywhere, much less to abandon his mom. She needed him. He needed her. And no one was taking him away. A tingle ran through him, igniting a fire beneath his skin.

"Eisah ... we're here to help," Siana said. He decided her voice was as scholarly as her appearance.

"I'm not going."

"Please, just listen to them," Mom said, her gentle expression aging with worry lines.

His body began to glow. He looked at his hands. Just like the dream.

"Ma'am, can you move please?" Raitr said, his tone commanding yet respectful.

Eisah watched Mom nervously move aside. It was obvious the alien was going to try something. They were *not* going to take him away. They couldn't make him. His body washed with golden light. A familiar rage swelled.

Disbelief short-circuited his anger when Raitr's body radiated a brilliant orange aura. The alien's hands clasped together, then shoved forward. A high-pitched tone filled the air as the orange light ripped forward and washed over everything in the room. As it passed over Eisah, he felt the burning dissipate. Then the golden light was gone, replaced by a new feeling of vulnerability, and he knew his strange abilities had just been neutralized. Every cell in his body felt it. When he could speak, he said to Raitr, "You really are ... like me."

"We're not here to fight you. We're here to help." Raitr allowed his glow to fade.

"He's still weak," Lanigan warned.

"I can help with that," Lady Elle said with a smile. She drew two green crystals from her pocket. As her hand opened, it looked as if small suns had erupted within the gems. "May I approach?"

Eisah hesitated. “Why?”

“Let me make you feel better. Please.”

“How will those help?”

“They heal. I promise it won’t hurt.”

He looked to his mother, then to the doctor. Neither looked worried. They appeared to trust the aliens. He was never one to blindly trust anyone. Trust had to be earned. Though, he trusted Mom.

“Okay.”

With a grateful nod, Lady Elle approached then reached out over his chest. Gripping the crystals, she crushed them to powder, which rained down as green energy upon him. A sensation like warm, flowing water spread from his chest outward to his extremities. A gasp escaped him. In an instant, he felt lighter, breathed easier. The surge of heat dissipated as fast as it began, and with it all discomfort from the wound. In fact, he could move the arm without any trouble. He gazed into Lady Elle’s eyes and smiled.

“Better?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said, and with a bit of pulling, freed his arm from the restraining bandages. “How did you ... ?”

Lady Elle smiled back, but ignored his query and returned to Headmaster Hyuzu’s side.

Mom implored, “Eisah, listen to them.”

The good feelings evaporated. “I’m not leaving you.”

Headmaster Hyuzu hesitated, then said, “You don’t have to. Evelyn ... your mother can come too.”

The others looked at her with genuine surprise. The headmaster held her gaze on him. “I understand she needs you, Eisah. And your devotion to your mother is a beautiful quality. And, now I need you to understand that *you need us*. So please, come with us to Weun Academy.”

“And Mom can come?”

“Of course she can.”

Grateful, Evelyn nodded to the headmaster, then added in a wavering tone, “Besides, now’s a good time to explore off-world options.”

“Okay,” he said, sensing some deeper, unsettled meaning. “So, where is this Weun Academy?”

The headmaster smiled.

(To be continued...)