At her wits end where James’ safety is concerned, Noria and two new friends set out to rescue him. Before they can get too far, they are intercepted by an old acquaintance—a figure that Noria’s friends believe to be dead. But Noria soon learns Totherma’s interception is a godsend. She has a much less dangerous way to locate James.

**Dark Matter Doors**

Totherma waved her hand, and suddenly three circles of light appeared on the ground on either side of us.

“I’ve seen those before!” I said.

“Do you know what they are?” she asked.

“They look like the Venn diagram,” I shook my head. “But I don’t know what they’re called here. They just appeared before one of my visions of James. And then . . . it was like—well, I saw myself over there, but then I was here. It was like I was . . .”

“In two places at once?”

“Exactly!”

Totherma nodded, as though being in two places at once was exactly what she expected me to say. “These,” she said, gesturing to the circles, “are a dark matter door. And yes, they are exactly what their name implies—a door that opens a passage into dark matter.”

“Dark matter?” I breathed. Samir, my old physics tutor, had taught me about dark matter in our lessons. Dark matter was the space *between* space. Earth’s physicists still weren’t exactly sure what it was or did, but Totherma was most likely about to tell me. After being here a while, I thought I might already know.

“Is dark matter what you call the matter between realms?” I asked.

Totherma beamed down at me, like a proud teacher admiring her favorite pupil. “Yes. That and everything else. There is dark matter all around us right now; we just can’t see it because it’s in a metaphysical sphere.”

“Like a spirit world?” I asked.

“Some in the Olden Realm have called it that. You may have also heard it referred to as the Fairy Paths, or the Underworld, or Ley lines. In a way it’s all of those things. Right now, all you need to understand is that it’s a way to get from one place to another very quickly.”

“Like a hoption hole,” I said.

Totherma nodded slowly. “Similar, but hoption holes can only be used within the sphere of a single realm. Dark matter doors have the ability to take you to different realms entirely.”

“So James is in a different realm?” I asked, alarmed.

“I didn’t say that.”

“But if he was, a dark matter door could take me there?”

“Precisely,” Totherma smiled. “The other difference between a hoption hole and a dark matter door is that you cannot pass through a hoption hole without your body, whereas with a dark matter door you can’t pass through with it.”

I realized what she was saying. “So the other day, when I saw myself in two places at once,” I began, trying to wrap my mind around what she was saying, “it was because my soul had separated itself from my body?”

Totherma nodded.

I shivered in spite of the warm night. It was what I’d suspected that night in my neutralocite cell.

Finally, Totherma moved over to one of the circles of light. “Now watch carefully so I don’t have to do this twice.”

I nodded, keeping my eyes fixed on her.

She floated into the circle. As soon as she was directly over its center, she vanished.

I blinked at the circle. “Totherma? Totherma, where are you?” I called.

*Can you hear me, Noria?* It was Totherma’s voice. I jumped, spinning around to find her, but no one was there.

*I’m in your head, libkin. Traveling through dark matter allows me to speak to your soul.*

I turned back to the circles of light. For the first time, I noticed there was a peculiar design inside one of the circles. It was simple, but elegant and something about it reminded me of the crop circles “aliens” left in barley or cornfields back in the Olden Realm.

I’d just completed this thought, when Totherma was back. She floated out of the circle with the design, and hovered in front of me again.

“I apologize for not asking permission first,” she said, “but I find the first time goes easier that way.”

“I don’t understand,” I said. “Is this how you were able to meet Uncle Jack outside the Caves of Aegissida all those years ago?” A dozen questions flooded my mind. “Is this how you were able to help me stop Cifer from figuring out I had the Haven?”

“Yes. What you see before you—this image of me—it is not really me,” she said. “Or I should say, it is not really my body standing before you. It is my soul, correct?”

I nodded.

“And my body is back in my own rodãor, safe and sound.”

“But why not come in the flesh?” I asked, still confused.

“Because my body cannot pass through the dark matter. Only metaphysical matter can.”

“Like the Dogrils without Cobbogothian bodies?” I asked.

“Yes, and if you still wish to see Jamus,” Totherma explained, “I can take your soul to see him through a dark matter door.”

“Really?” I asked. “You can do that . . . right now?”

“Libkin, *I* am the Opalian Eye; there is very little I cannot do.” Her proud words hung in contrast to the self-deprecating twist of her mouth.

I smiled up at her. She gave all the appearance of a “Grand Lady” and yet it was refreshing to see that she was able to make light of her power, in spite of her position. I liked her more and more.

“So how does it work?” I finally asked

Totherma paused a moment, as though she was carefully mulling my question over. “Let’s see, I could keep you here for years and years, trying to explain it to you, or, for the sake of what’s at stake, I could just show you.”

I hesitated a moment. I didn’t love the idea of leaving my body here in the open while Totherma took my soul through one of these dark matter doors. But I closed my eyes, picturing James—saw him writhing, broken and burning up as though I was right there in the room with him.

It was all I needed to make up my mind. “Show me,” I said.

Totherma smiled and then reached out, as if to take my chin in her hand. “First, I need permission to help your soul out of your body.”

“Permission?” I asked.

“Yes. Whenever a situation warrants it, I like to ask permission before I enter another’s body. It is your body, after all. Only the Dogrils and Cifer invade others’ minds and bodies so thoughtlessly.”

“You have my permission,” I said, my voice shaking a little. It was one thing for Totherma to randomly show up in my mind, it was quite another to wait, knowing that she would any second.

“Good. Now lie down here,” Totherma pointed to one of the circles without a design in its center. I did as she said and situated myself where she indicated on the ground.

Next she moved into the opposite circle.

A sharp zap zinged through my body.

Then I wasn’t lying on my back anymore. Instead, I stood in the opposite circle with Totherma, staring down at my body still lying in the first.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

I swallowed. “I think so.”

“Good kyndie.” Totherma then drew my attention to the third circle. It overlapped the other two; all were connected, creating a Celtic looking version of Borromean Rings—three circles all linked together in a sort of triangular design.

I tried really hard not to think about how weird it was to see myself lying there. “Am I—am I still breathing?” I asked.

Totherma reached up and smoothed my hair—or my soul’s hair. It was a peculiar sensation, and I was surprised to find it was far more potent than if she’d done it while I was in my body—like I didn’t feel the motion in my head but throughout my entire being.

“You are just sleeping very deeply.”

I nodded, letting out a shaky breath. I wondered how much more of the impossible it would take before I got used to this place.

“Now,” Totherma continued, “do you see the design in these two circles?” She pointed at the two circles with the crop circle designs.

Again, I nodded.

“These designs are maps—maps to particular paths that run through the dark matter. There is a different map for every path.”

“How many paths are there?” I asked.

“Many. You will soon memorize all of them as I have. It is one of the reasons the Gihara gave you an extraordinary memory.”

“Really? I’ve always thought it was just one more reason to consider myself a freak.”

Totherma tut-tutted. “By the time you’re old, libkin, you’ll realize just how much you take it for granted.”

I smiled back at her. “So where does this map lead?” I asked, directing her attention back to the dark matter doors, to the second circle in particular.

“This map is the map to your soul.”

“Is this the map you used when you helped me defeat Cifer in Earth’s realm?” I asked.

“Almost. I had to make a few alterations so I could first pass into Earth’s realm.”

I shook my head. “You can do that—just change the maps when you want?” Samir would’ve loved to experience this.

To demonstrate, Totherma waved her hand over the third circle in the dark matter door. Suddenly, the design in the center changed. This design was different than the first, but still simple.

“This map will take you to your friends over there on the shore,” she said. She waved her hand again, and a slightly more complex map appeared in the circle. “This one will take you back to Resistance headquarters.”

“How do you know where they all lead?” I asked in awe.

“Because I created them all. It’s one of the powers of a Space Shifter. We are the only ones who are permitted by the Gihara to open dark matter doors and the only ones who can create paths through the dark matter.”

Totherma waved her hand a final time, and this time an extremely intricate map appeared. It was different than the others, with several flourishes and spirals leading every which way.

As I looked down at it, I noticed something else that was different from the others. There was a small blue light pulsing at the center of the map.

“What is that?” I asked.

Totherma grew serious now. “In the dark matter you will see the souls of every living thing.” I could feel her eyes on me. “But the souls that you are bound to—the way you’re bound to Jamus—will call to you by shining brighter than the rest.”

I turned to look at her, but she directed my attention back to the circle.

“That pulsing light right there,” she said, “is Jamus’ soul calling you.”

I breathed out, my heart lurching in response to James’ light. “Then he’s still alive?” I whispered.

Totherma smiled gently. “Yes, libkin. He’s alive.”

It was as though her words were electricity, spurring me into motion.

“Wait, Nor—.”

But before I knew what I was doing, I’d rushed for the dark matter door. The next instant, everything went silent and black. I waited, my heart beating with nothing but the thought that James was still alive.

Then the blackness vanished. Soul-shaking noise and neon colors blasted me like icy water. Shapes of light appeared, bleeding against the darkness like smeared chalk on a black canvas. There were outlines of trees, giant fireflies, rocks, grass—water teeming with light and energy and noise.

I stood in wonder, as a path of light—a path very similar to the Drusy Path—flashed out in front of me like car lights racing over a darkened highway.

I moved toward it, ready to find James—ready to rescue him from the torture he’d been enduring for at least two weeks—when a sharp screech to my left stopped me. I turned to see what it was.

I screamed as a frothy fanged Dogril sped for my throat.