



WORLDS COLLIDE

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AN OTHERWORLD
FLASH STORY

Thanksgiving 2050

Savannah, GA

JAMES ROCHESTER HUDDLED deeper into his coat, staring at the ground as he trudged along the path. *No wonder Forsyth Park is empty. It's freezing. Why did Professor Bronscher have to assign a paper over break?*

He glanced up for a moment, noticing a large bird circling in the sky above the trees. *Mark and Petyr would be laughing at me for thinking this is cold.*

As he passed the Civil War memorial, the bird dove through a gap in the trees ahead. He stopped, half-hidden by a tree, and stared as the bird – a falcon, he thought – landed on the ground. What happened next was bizarre, even considering what he'd learned about Arkeda a few months ago.

The falcon began to change. The bird's head morphed into a human head. The feathers disappeared as its body elongated, stretching to six feet. The wings stretched out, becoming arms. Within seconds, there was a bronze-skinned man with a black leather jacket and black hair in a bun. He crossed his arms and stalked down the path, muttering in Italian.

James crept after him, slipping from tree to tree, straining to hear what the man was saying. He had been practicing his Italian, but the bird-man was talking almost too fast for James to translate.

"Gods, I'm cold. Why did we have to leave Italy? I really hate it here. America is too similar to Rome and Greece for my taste."

What is he? James wondered. He's not Otran, unless Arkeda is still hiding something, but there's no way he's human.

The man stopped and looked around. James froze as the man spotted him. They stared at each other for a moment. Then the man said something about how he shouldn't have had that last drink and Abena was going to kill him, and ran.

James took off after him, glad now that Petyr had forced him to come along on his morning runs. It wasn't hard to keep up.

He caught up with the bird-man at the tennis courts. "Wait!"

The man stopped and glared at him. "What do you want?"

He spoke English without a trace of an accent, despite his fluent Italian earlier.

"I saw what you did back there," James said. "How did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"You were a bird. Then you turned human. How did you do it?"

"I don't know what you thought you saw, but are you feeling okay? Do I need to take you to a hospital or something?"

James scowled at him. "I'm not crazy. You're not Otran. They're telepaths, not shapeshifters. Where are you from?"

The man's eyes widened. He muttered a few words that weren't Italian but sounded like curses, then said in English, "I'm from Italy."

Does he really expect me to believe that? James thought. "No, you're not," he said aloud. "Italians don't turn into birds."

The man sighed. "You're not going to drop this, are you?"

James shook his head. "Not until I get an answer that's less ridiculous. You're not human. Where are you from?"

“Well,” the man said. “I have been living in Italy for the last thousand years, so it’s technically true. What’s your name, kid?”

“James,” he said. “And I’m not a kid.”

“Compared to me, you are,” the man smirked. “I’m Horus.”

James’ mind went blank. “As in *Horus* Horus? Ancient Egypt Horus?”

Horus grinned. “What other Horuses are there?”

“None that I know of,” James admitted. *There’s no way.*

“My friends are probably going to kill me for telling you this, but screw it. Us Egyptian gods weren’t just legends. We were the founders of Egypt. It was my planet’s colony.”

James stared at him. *First Otreau, now this?* “The gods of Egypt were real?” he stammered.

“Yeah. Honestly, I don’t even know if my planet, Thera, is still around anymore, but you mentioned something about Otreau?”

“Yeah, you’ve heard of it?”

“Thera had a lot of dealings with other planets. I’ve talked to a few Otrons, even been there once. How do you know about it? The Otrons I knew wouldn’t go to Earth.”

James thought for a moment. He couldn’t say too much. It wasn’t his secret to share.

“I know someone from there,” he said after a moment. “He lives here. On Earth, I mean. He’s been here ever since what happened twelve years ago.”

Horus gave him a blank look.

“The supernova?” James said. “You know about Otreau. How do you not know about that?”

“I’ve been in exile here,” Horus said. “I ran away when Rome took Egypt. I haven’t had contact with other *aliens* since then.”

James sighed. *Great. Why do I get to be the one to tell him?*

“Otreau is gone,” he said. “There was a supernova twelve years ago. The planet was destroyed. My friend is the only one who made it out.”

“What dumb thing did they do to cause that?”

“Nothing!” James said. “The binary star system was too close together. One star took too much mass from the other, and it got too big. There’s nothing you can do to prevent that.”

“Well, it’s not my problem,” Horus said. “I’m not pharaoh anymore. I have some other immortal friends to meet up with. Bye, kid.”

Horus turned into a bird and flew away.

James stared after him, trying to process everything Horus had said. *There are other aliens out there. Why is that so surprising?*

He shoved his hands in his coat pockets and started walking. *At least it can’t get any weirder.*