

The fantail pip-pip-pipped in fright as the talons of the diving magpie flicked a feather from her crown. A rush of wind followed the predator as he squawked in triumph.

The fantail flared her tail feathers in panic, tucked in her left wing for the turn and dived into the forest towards the gloom of the large-leafed puka tree.

The black and white plumage of the magpie glistened in the sun as he swooped up and stalled above the treetops. He turned his head to seek out his prey. Now he was just a bully bored enough to make sport of the fantail as she flitted through his territory.

As he dived back into the forest, his beady eyes flicked through the shadows and dappled light. The differing tree

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

levels made focussing difficult but his experienced eye could catch the smallest movement.

A brief flitter of russet almost camouflaged by the upper autumn foliage attracted his attention. He rapidly calculated the course of her current flight plan and, dodging through the upper branches, he arrowed towards his target.

The fantail ducked and dived as randomly as possible, all the while heading towards the safety she craved. Soon her wings began to tire.

A broad spread of glossy leaves ahead promised some cover where she hoped to hide until the magpie abandoned the chase. She landed clumsily on the branch of a puka and edged into its darkest shadows.

Panting heavily, comforted by the overhanging leaves, she glanced down. She might need an escape route. Below her, two humans crouched over a rocky stream that meandered through the forest floor.

“THWHACK!”

Eyes alight with mischief and malice, the magpie thumped onto the branch which shook violently. The fantail froze in terror as he moved confidently toward her, his beak poised to peck her into submission.

Suddenly he stopped; he cocked his head.

Something was happening to the fantail.

A sinister shadow, darker than the night shadows cast by the moon, was creeping up her scrawny legs. Like the liquid of dark sap from a tree the darkness crept up over her belly. Her feathers melded into solid scales.

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

Panic-struck the fantail stared at the magpie. Coldness spread through her little body as she became encased in black oil; oil that neither gleamed nor glistened. From the nothingness she had become her eyes shone and sparkled.

The star-bright eyes mesmerised the magpie.

The transformation complete, the fantail spread her wings and turned to challenge the magpie.

He was afraid now, not of the little bird who dared to face him, but of what the bird had become: something dark and mean; a killer.

He wrenched his gaze from those hypnotic eyes. The fantail peeped once before she launched herself at the magpie. As he turned to flee her talons clawed into his back. He screeched in terror and pain. Her wings gripped his as he tried to flee.

“Gripped?”

That was the magpie’s last coherent thought as an icy coldness crept from the fantail’s claws and into his body. Her wings expanded to enfold the magpie as he fought desperately to break free. The fantail’s wings encompassed him. Relentlessly the larger bird was drawn up into the black mass.

It was all over in a matter of seconds.

The last of the magpie’s body was absorbed into the fantail. She settled back onto the branch. The darkness reversed, it leached out of her and back into the leafy shadows of the forest.

She flexed her talons and stretched her wings. She shivered, shook her head and twitched her tail. Ready, she flicked off the branch and headed for home and safety.

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

As she soared through the shadows a single feather detached and floated gently down.



2

Cole Fletcher watched the feather float down onto his outstretched palm. He had heard the commotion above and the squawk so abruptly terminated. His eyes, sharp as an eagle, could normally spot a needle in a haystack. Today the branches and the shifting shadows of the late afternoon sun had prevented him seeing much at all.

Something had sent the fantail skittering back into the forest. By the noise whatever else had been up there had gotten off considerably worse. What had the fantail to do with that?

He tipped his hand and let the feather fall to the stream at his feet. He watched it float past his sister as she washed a plastic plate in the babbling waters.

“Come on, Cole. You haven’t finished drying.” Lily was decidedly grumpy. “We’re leaving soon and personally I can’t

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

wait to get out of here.”

“Did you see any of that, sis?”

“Any of what?”

“You don’t appreciate nature much, do you?” Cole grinned as he crouched down to pick up a tea towel, and a pot cursorily scrubbed.

“Nature,” Lily snorted. She waved the dish-brush at the knives and forks bunched in the cold water. “I’m sick of nature. A whole week stuck in the middle of nowhere. No Internet, no TV, no flushing loo!”

“Oh, come on, Lily,” said Cole. “This has been fun, out here with Mum and Dad. All that weird stuff no-one else has ever seen before. And you’ve been doing some amazing drawings again,” he added.

“Not so bad,” said Lily with mock modesty. “But I didn’t need to come out here to draw.”

Her long black hair almost touched the water as she turned to hand the last of the cutlery to Cole.

“Yeah, but it was for Dad’s work. And everybody we usually stay with took off on holiday as soon as it stopped raining.” Cole put the last of the washing-up into the basket. “Uncle Freddie and Aunt Nancy had to head back to London anyway.”

“But I’m seventeen,” cried Lily stretching. She was stiff from crouching so long. “I’d be fine on my own!”

Cole swished his hands in the cool stream and leapt to his feet. The pebbles clinked as he lost then regained his balance. He shook his hands, spraying droplets of water.

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

He grinned at his sister. As usual, she was dressed all in black: jeans, T-shirt, Doc Martins (with the stitching inked black), lips and fingernails. Even her hair, though black, was definitely not Lily's natural colour.

Blonde hair ruled in his family. His mum liked to call it platinum blonde. Grandma said they all looked like beach-bums. Especially Cole. Despite the attentions of his mother, any number of hairdressers, and his sister's silly friends, his hair remained wild and woolly and stuck out at all angles.

"Mum and Dad most probably figured you'd invite your Goth mates round for Goth parties," he teased her, "and the house would be trashed or painted black by the time we got back."

"Ow!" he exclaimed as Lily punched his shoulder. Off-balance, Cole had a few anxious moments before he steadied himself with some deft footwork. His judo training had helped him avoid falling into the ice-cold water.

"What did you do that for?" He rubbed his left shoulder.

"I would not have trashed the house. I'm a responsible adult now.

"But, sorry, Cole. I didn't mean to hit you so hard," she added.

"What? That little tap? I didn't feel a thing."

"Yeah right, I forgot you're a teenager." She laughed. "A real tough guy. Now, grab the dishes and let's get back to Mum and Dad. If we're lucky they've packed up the tents and we'll be out of this place as soon as."

She flicked the tea towel over the basket of plates. "So

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

nature doesn't poop on them," she said smiling.

Cole picked up the basket and followed his sister uphill towards the camp. They wove their way along the faint trail as the fading light flickered through the treetops, and shadows shifted in the underbrush.

At the crest of the ridge that overlooked both the stream behind and the campsite ahead, Lily waited for Cole beneath a manuka tree. She was absently peeling off small strips of silvery bark and dropping them to the forest floor.

"Excellent," she said with relief. "The tent is down."

As Cole reached Lily he stopped and looked curiously at his sister's feet.

"Hey Lily..." he said. No response.

"Um... Lily?" He spoke louder when she didn't turn round. "LILY!"

Finally Lily turned.

"What?"

Cole stared at her black boots. He tilted his head and bit his lower lip.

"What?" repeated Lily. "Jeez, you're annoying."

"Your boots look odd, sis." Gingerly Cole stepped forward. "But... I don't know..."

As he spoke he saw a puzzled frown cross her face. Lily stood stock-still and goose-bumps sprang up on her forearms. The hair at the back of her neck stood up as a cold shiver in her toes began to spread up her legs.

"What is it?" Cole was frightened now.

Lily swallowed hard and struggled to move her feet. Her

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

Doc Martens seemed to weigh a ton and there was no strength in her legs. Yes, her boots were black but this was a different sort of black; no dust, no reflection. Only the dark creeping inexorably past her boot tops. Only the sensation of freezing cold.

“Cole, I can’t move.” Her voice trembled in fear. “I can’t feel my feet. Oh, Cole, what is it?”

Cole set down the basket and stepped closer.

The darkness slowly climbed to Lily’s knees.

“I don’t know. It’s like a shadow, and it’s moving. And it’s so black.”

Cole was fascinated. He reached out with his left hand and as he nearly touched her, sparks, like static electricity, cracked between them.

Lily’s arm jerked back.

A piercing scream threatened to burst their eardrums. Instantly the black shadow slid down off her legs. Swiftly, it withdrew into the forest, a darker shadow amongst the lingering gloom.

“What was that?” cried Lily. “And what did you do?”

“I don’t know, Lily. Honest. And those sparks. That was wicked.”

“It’s this creepy forest.” Lily spoke between clenched teeth. “It’s like there’s something always watching me.”

Nervously she glanced around, then stomped down fiercely, first with one foot, then the other, as though to force out any remaining cold through the soles of her boots.

“I hate it here!”

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

Without another word she turned and strode down the path towards the camp.



3

Cole watched the fading light trace shadows across his sister's back as she disappeared into the lower brush. He was puzzled. There was something unnatural about that shadow, the way it had crept up her black boots. It had moved with purpose. It wasn't completely mindless.

"Very creepy," he said out loud, echoing Lily's words. He shook his body like a dog shaking off water.

He bent to retrieve the basket of dishes and as he lifted it, his left arm went numb. Plates and cutlery clattered out of the basket as he let go. Immediately the feeling returned. As he bent to pick up the scattered dishes, scrabbling through dead leaves, he felt something cold brush over his back.

"Stuff that." He hoped he sounded braver than he felt. "Wait

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

up Lily,” he shouted. “I’m coming.”

He grabbed whatever he could and jammed it into the basket, leaves and all and started down the trail after his sister. He couldn’t help glancing into the trees either side as he went, half-hoping for something to explain what he had felt.

“That was weird,” he mumbled.

He was still frowning and trying to figure it out when he almost ran into Lily. She stood still and silent beside the tree that marked the boundary of their campsite. Their tents had been set up in a natural clearing that backed against a high cliff. The cliff-face was riddled with caves their dad had insisted on exploring, adding mysterious jottings to his notebook as he went.

Lily put her hand over his mouth.

“Shh.” She pulled Cole in behind the tree. “Mum and Dad are talking about Asher.”

Cole was astonished. Their older brother hadn’t been mentioned since he died over a year ago. Every time he had said something about Asher, his mum would burst into tears.

Lily put her finger to her lips and turned to listen. Cole set down the basket and held on to Lily’s arm; he leant forward so he could hear as well.

They didn’t have to listen too hard. The exchange between their mother and father was more than a little heated.

“...Annabella, please be reasonable. I’m doing the best I can. That’s why we are here.” Cole had never heard his dad so excited. “It’s taken over a year’s research to get this far and look what I’ve have found.”

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

He held out a wooden box. The twilight picked out words and symbols in the dark tarnished grain.

“...all these shadows. It’s been a nightmare.” The children heard the pain in their mother’s voice. “He’s not dead. I know that, I know that in my heart. And so do you Jeremiah.”

“Face it, honey. If he isn’t dead, he might as well be.”

Lily stared at Cole in astonishment. Cole shrugged his shoulders. Asher not dead? Impossible.

“He is dead,” he whispered. “He must be.”

Lily nodded, but Cole saw the uncertainty in her face. She had cried for weeks after Dad told them Asher had drowned while surfing off Raglan. Lily, less than two years younger, was only now coming to terms with losing her older brother. Cole missed Asher too; but he was still at Intermediate and hadn’t had too much to do with him once Asher went to High School.

He saw the tears forming in Lily’s eyes, and gently squeezed her arm.

Gratefully, she put her hand over his, smiled through her tears, and squeezed back.

“I thought so too. But...” Again Lily put her finger to her lips as their mother replied.

“Two weeks here, all my hopes...” Annabella hesitated. “Jeremiah, I know this was my dream...about Asher...that you could find an answer but I just can’t go on...”

Again she stopped.

“Honey.” Jeremiah sighed. “I know it was an off-chance but with what I’ve found here we’re one step closer to...Sshhh! I

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

hear the kids coming back.”

Cole, leaning too far around the tree, had nudged the basket of stacked dishes, causing them to clatter.

Cole picked up the basket, stepped back onto the trail and walked into the campsite. Lily, her head bowed, followed quietly behind.

“Hey Mum. Hey Dad,” he called in a jolly voice. “Oh rats. You’ve got everything packed away already. We were rushing back to help you, eh sis?”

Jeremiah stooped to tuck the wooden box he was holding under the driver’s seat of their rented Hyundai SUV.

“Of course you were, son.” He laughed and ruffled Cole’s hair. “Thank you for the thought. Next time I will do the dishes and you can pack up camp.”

He winked at his wife, who had turned away as soon as they had arrived. As she faced them, tears still glistened on her face. She wiped them away self-consciously and forced a smile. “That’s sounds like a great idea.”

“You sad to be leaving, Mum?” Cole handed the dishes to his dad.

Lily gave Cole a quick frown and a shake of her head. She walked over to her mum and hugged her.

“It will be all OK,” she said. “We’re going home.”

Annabella smiled as she returned her daughter’s embrace.

“Yep,” she said. She let out a deep breath. “Going home will be good.”

“OK, all packed up. Everyone please do a quick check to see we haven’t left anything behind.” Jeremiah put the dish

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

basket into the boot and slammed shut the door.

“Ah!” shouted Cole triumphantly. “So that’s where the fire-lighters disappeared to.”

He pulled them out from a depression beneath a moss-covered boulder.

“You little monster,” cried Lily. “I bet you did that deliberately.”

It had been her duty to light the fire each morning and she’d been forced to do it the hard way with bracken and twigs.

Cole laughed and tossed the box to his dad.

The sun was poised above the cliff edge, finally burning away the ever-present clouds. The clearing was bathed in light; the shadows banished into the trees.

“I wish it had been like this the whole time,” said Lily regretfully.

“Me too,” sighed her mum looking around.

Cole squinted up at the sky and spread his arms wide. “Ahhhh... Vitamin D.”

“Glad you know your science,” said his dad.

Lily muttered, “Know-it-all.”

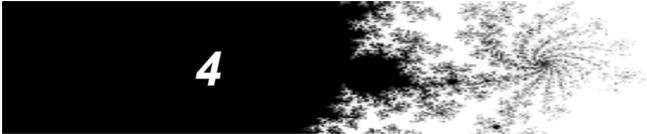
“Oy, I heard that,” said Dad sternly as he climbed into the driver’s seat. “Not so much of the rude comments, please. Now, everybody jump aboard and let’s head back to civilisation.”

“Oh yes, please!” exclaimed Lily as she scrambled into the back seat followed by Cole.

Annabella got in beside her husband, and within seconds the rumble of the SUV disappearing down the dirt track abated.

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

The forest hesitated before the silence returned to hushed murmurs. The shadows waited.



4

Cole rubbed his closed eyes with his knuckles as hard as he dared. He loved the shapes and shades that appeared and spun behind his eyelids. The colours kaleidoscoped and pulsed across his vision as he changed the pressure. If he concentrated he could conjure up strange and bizarre scenes.

“Weirdo.” Lily knew what he was doing.

“Thanks, sis.”

Cole took that as a compliment. He stared at Lily. She dressed weirdly. All that black, from her hair to her boots. Black did accentuate her grey eyes and pale skin though. His classmates said she was a ‘hottie.’ Cole would roll his eyes and say “Yeah right, losers.” Still, he was glad she was his sister.

Cole smiled. “Still no cell coverage to text your 5000 Facey

friends?”

Lily4 studied her iPad, now hooked up to the back seat cigarette lighter. Frustrated, she tapped at the screen trying to pull up a signal.

“Something starting with T.”

Dad had obviously heard the whispered exchange.

“Traffic,” mumbled Annabella. She sat slumped in her seat, the dark rings under her eyes exaggerated by the gloomy dusk.

“Oh, yeah, Mum.” Lily rolled her eyes. “We’ve seen, like, one car in ages. This is so boring. How long till we get somewhere civilized?”

“Two hour’s drive, Princess,” her dad answered.

“Why couldn’t we have a proper holiday,” Lily continued, “instead of vanishing into the middle of nowhere?”

“It was cool,” said Cole. “Heaps of stuff in those caves, eh, Dad?”

His mum and dad glanced at each other.

Before Jeremiah could reply Cole added, “I bet Dad found something to talk about for his history lectures. Just like Indiana Jones.”

“Ah, yeah ... That’s right, son.”

Cole was puzzled by his dad’s reply. He had hoped for an explanation for the strange holiday, and he was curious about that mysterious box.

“Oh sure, Cole,” Lily shook her head. “Like there’d be anything up here that would keep anyone awake in history... Oh yay, finally got cell coverage and...350 messages in my inbox. My friends do love me”. She slumped down into her

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

seat and tapped furiously away on her iPad.

“Back to the real world of Facebooking, Tweeting, and email?”

Cole smiled. He released the pressure on his eyes. He eased his knuckles away and slowly raised his upper eyelids. The kaleidoscope effect lingered, splitting the surrounding hills into sharp rotating diamonds.

He faced his sister and everything turned black and white.

“Cool,” he chuckled.

Lily glanced up. “Double weirdo.” Adding as Cole rolled up his eyes up, “And multi-creepy.”

Cole blinked several times.

“Seven days and already your blonde roots are showing,” he teased. “You’re being de-Gothed.”

Lily glared at him. Cole batted his eyes in his attempt to look cute. Lily concentrated on her iPad, though a hint of a smile crossed her face.

“Phew!” Cole reckoned it would be a long trip if he had annoyed her so soon.

“TRUCK!”

Annabella screamed out the word, though her eyes were closed.

Startled, Jeremiah stared ahead.

“I know it starts with ‘T’ but I can’t see a truck anywhere.”

Annabella’s eyes sprang open. “It’s coming!”

Jeremiah concentrated on the dappled highway ahead.

A low sun filtered through the trees and formed deep shadows across the road. They were headed down a hill framed

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

by heavy forest. At the bottom of the hill the road narrowed to a one-lane bridge.

Cole stared between the front seats to the road rising up on the opposite hill.

“I can’t see anything.” Jeremiah frowned,

“There it is,” exclaimed Cole pointing toward the top of the hill.

“Oh, damn!” Jeremiah growled in frustration.

A Mac truck and trailer unit had appeared over the crest. Cole heard the thunder of its engine, and a graunching of gears as it accelerated towards the narrow bridge. Black smoke poured out of the exhaust. The huge rig was painted matt black. Even the windscreen was black.

Cole glanced at Lily, pressed back into her seat, her knuckles in her mouth.

“Pull over, Dad!” she screamed. “Pull over!”

Jeremiah fought the steering wheel. It refused to turn. He jammed on the brakes but there was no response. He grunted with the strain.

“I can’t do it.”

They would meet the truck smack in the middle of the bridge. Jeremiah released the controls. The car remained on its collision course.

“He’s found us, honey,” Jeremiah whispered to Annabella.

She nodded. Her eyes brimmed with tears.

“What’s happening, Dad?” cried Cole. “Who’s found us?”

Jeremiah stared at Annabella. “He has control over both vehicles. There is only one thing we can do.”

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

His wife nodded wearily, and turned to her children, strangely composed. All sense of time changed. The family was rocketing towards destruction, but there were moments enough to do something.

“OK kids, we can get out of this but only if you trust us.” Jeremiah spoke calmly with serious intent. “This will be strange, and you must stay focused. Ignore whatever is happening outside.”

“Your dad and I are different...”

Annabella’s words faltered as she saw how Cole grinned at Lily. She forced herself to continue.

“... and we can do this. But it must be together.”

Annabella reached out her left hand to Cole and Lily.

Lily stared at the oncoming truck.

“What are you talking about?” Fiercely emphatic. “We’re going to die! Do something!”

Jeremiah retrieved the wooden box from under the seat.

“Lily, please trust us. Just put your hand on your mum’s and I’ll explain later.”

”I trust you, Dad.”

Cole placed his hand firmly on his mother’s. Immediately on connection an electric tingle spread through his body.

“C’mon, sis. Do it else we’ll all get smashed to bits.”

“Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! ...” Lily hyperventilated. She stared at her mum, her eyes pleading.

“It’ll be OK, Lily.” Annabella smiled. “We know what we are doing. Now put your hand on Cole’s.”

As she spoke, Annabella’s hair shone silver, fanning around

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

her head as though charged with electricity.

Lily's eyes fixed on the truck as it loomed before them.

"There's no-one driving," she whispered.

Jeremiah said, "I know, princess. Please... give me your hand."

Cole, ignoring Lily's hesitation, grabbed her limp hand and folded it in his own.

"Ready?"

Jeremiah smiled at Annabella and fastened his broad hand on top of Lily's. Cole saw his dad's hair shine silver. Their car was only moments from a colossal smash.

Annabella nodded and closed her eyes.

"Ready my handsome saviour. Ready once again."

And she and Jeremiah whispered together, "DreamTime."

The bumper of the huge black Mac truck touched the front grill of the Hyundai. The car filled with a blaze of bright, silvery light. Pastel and fluorescent colours flared and shimmered. From the joined hands radiated a rainbow bubble that encompassed the family before bursting into a myriad of bright flecks of light.

And then there was nothing.

On top of the hill overlooking the little bridge, a dark shadow detached from the shade of a giant kauri.

Staring down on the scene below, the shadow's gleaming eyes took in the cacophony of sound, light and destructive

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

power as the massive Mac crushed the SUV. A ball of flame erupted from the explosion. Smoke and shards of metal spiralled off in all directions.

“Well done, Dad.”

The harsh voice momentarily quietened the boom from below. The shadow’s eyes glittered with a terrible beauty.

“Next time ...”

As it watched, the destructive power below stilled for a second. Then the explosion started to reverse. The scattered shrapnel of the collided vehicles imploded and was sucked back into the roiling smoke. With a hiss and thunder-clap the debris disappeared. Nothing was left of the two vehicles, no evidence of any crash.

The shadow smiled, and with a disdainful wave of a black hand began to pulse. The surrounding light was black, not silver, a rip in the daylight. Shot through the darkness were jet-black flashes of nothing.

The shadow vanished.

It was quite some time before the wildlife felt safe enough to return to this part of the forest.



5

Cole bent over, hands on knees and kept still. Very, very still. He breathed slowly and deeply. The gurgle in his stomach was warning him he could throw up.

He opened his eyes, which had been screwed tight.

And abruptly shut them again.

He took another deep breath, and reopened his eyes. However far down he looked, there was nothing below him. Standing on the glass floor of the Sky Tower had freaked him out big time, but at least he could see the ground. Now...nothing.

Cole tentatively lifted his left foot and replaced it - on nothing. He had to be standing on something.

“That’s weird.”

He took another deep breath and risked straightening up. He was staring directly at a wall. No, not a wall, a curtain, smoothly undulating as if from some unfelt breeze.

And what a curtain!

White and delicate, and patterned with a myriad of shifting colours like the Northern Lights up in the Arctic. A curtain that went on forever, stretching beyond Cole’s vision. He looked down. Yep, it went way down, way past his bare feet. He looked to his left and to his right. Curtain.

Even as he watched, the curtain rippled; the colours shifted, merged and shimmered. Bands of yellow flowed lightly across his vision, followed by a band of green that glimmered intensely before fading. Cole noticed flashes of light twinkling over the moving folds, like sparks from a giant sparkler.

He felt himself rotate slowly clockwise, though not of his own volition. As he turned, his mind, already boggled, boggled even further.

In front of him was a series of ... well, something like hundreds, no, thousands - No! Squintazamillions of 3D movie screens stacked on top of each other and side by side. Some displayed only shifting rainbow colours, but most of them were turned on and each was showing a different programme.

Cole found it hard to focus on any single image. The scenes constantly changed, flashing and colourful, and his eyes flicked from picture to picture. Some TVs showed deep green forests, others rooms with people in them. He saw corn fields ripened beneath deep blue skies, fish in the indigo shadows

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

beneath the oceans, cars zooming down busy roads, and crowds that danced and sang. Yet the noise didn't thrash his ears as he half-expected. In fact, only when he gazed directly at a screen could he begin to hear distinct sounds. Essentially there was nothing but a deep humming that vibrated through his body.

Cole was relieved he had finally stopped turning. Now the curtain was behind him, a strangely warm and comforting presence.

And his mum and dad were there to Cole's immediate right. He gaped at their outfits: matching jumpsuits of many shades of blue, with knee-high blue boots. Both also wore floor-length blue capes that caught his eye because of how the material, similar to the curtain, constantly moved and drifted. Both parents were armed with two long silver handled swords crossed high behind their backs like samurai warriors. Their hair now was pure silver, worn long, and flowing as though stirred by a gentle breeze.

"Aaawwwweesome!" exclaimed Cole.

"AARRGGHH."

Startled, Cole stared past his parents to where Lily had grabbed hold of Annabella's cape and wrapped it around herself.

"Mum!" she cried. "I'm naked."

Annabella laughed. "Sorry, honey, I forgot. When anyone comes through the Shimmer - that's the giant curtain behind you - they only bring themselves. No clothes, no accessories. Just you in your birthday suit."

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

Cole immediately glanced down.

“Oops.” He, too, was naked as a jaybird. He ducked as close as he could and tugged at his dad’s cape.

Lily frowned. “Then how come you and Dad have got those ... those outfits on?”

“We are Guardians here. Whenever we come through the Shimmer, we wear the uniform we have chosen. Experienced dreamers, once they enter DreamTime, clothe themselves in whatever they like. But usually when people dream they’re not wearing anything.”

Cole tried to remember what he would normally wear in a dream. Nope, he had no idea. By now he was a bit embarrassed.

“But what do I do now? I can’t go round like this ... I ... Mum?”

“Think of what you’d like to wear, Lily. It’s all up to you and your imagination.”

Cole peeked behind his parents. Lily’s bum stuck out behind the cloak. He snickered.

Lily glanced back and glared at him. She screwed up her face in concentration and let the cloak fall.

“Whoa!” Cole exclaimed.

Lily was dressed now in black from head to toe. The T-shirt was black, the leather vest and the skin-tight denims. Her Doc Marten boots and even her hair. And her favourite makeup – all black.

Annabella’s face whitened and Jeremiah frowned.

“Ah, princess, that’s not the best colour for here. I’ll explain

Guardians of the Shimmer: DreamTime

later; but, please, can you choose something else.”

“Oh!” Lily shook her head in exasperation, but within seconds switched to a deep shade of purple. “Better?”

“Thanks honey.” The colour was back in Annabella’s cheeks. “Black is not good here, Lily, because of the VELI.”

“The VELI? The Shimmer? DreamTime? What is going on?” asked Cole. “Where are we? Are we dead? And what is it with the swords? Are you guys ninjas or something?”

Jeremiah laughed. “Something like that, I guess. Your mum and I will try to answer your questions, but first we have to get to Shelter - and quickly. It’s a fair distance and we should get going.”

He took a step back, staring at his son. “Wow, Cole.”

Lily stared at him, too. “How did you do that? Those are pretty wild threads, little brother.”

Cole checked out his new clothes, which were similar to his parents’, right down to the cape and boots.

“I thought Mum and Dad’s outfits were pretty amazing,” he replied. “I guess I must have thought that I wanted to be like them.”

“But on your clothes, son, the colours are changing.”

“Just like the Shimmer,” cried Annabella. Her gaze flicked between the curtain and Cole’s costume. “Look, it matches how the Shimmer changes. Oh, Jeremiah!”

“Don’t think about what it means, honey,” said Jeremiah. “Not yet.”

He turned to Cole. “Interesting, Cole, very interesting indeed. I expect there’ll be a few comments at Shelter about

this.”

“Why? It just happened.” Cole shrugged. “I thought about the outfit like you said and it did the colour thing itself. I couldn’t get the swords though.”

“That’s correct, son. Your weapons are bestowed by the Shimmer when a Guardian becomes part of a Ghost.”

“A Ghost?” asked Lily, anxiously.

“You’ll both have lots of questions.” Jeremiah smiled. “We’ll explain as much as we can, but let’s get to Shelter.”