

THE LUCY WILSON MYSTERIES

COPY/PASTE

FEATURING
A MESSAGE
FROM THE
BRIGADIER!

JONATHAN MACHO

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JONATHAN MACHO

*With an additional piece by
Richard Brewer*



CANDY JAR BOOKS · CARDIFF
2020

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It was day six of the lockdown and Lucy Wilson was beginning to forget what socks felt like.

She eyed them warily from across the room – two woolly droopy things, discarded over a chair. She remembered they were useful. Of course they were, but after what felt like forever padding about indoors and her daily walks around her street in her slippers, she had decided that their use may have been a little over-hyped by the older generations.

What good were socks if you couldn't go to school? Play in the park? Run through a crashing alien ship after sabotaging the evil dark lord Zhregg's latest plan to conquer the world?

Lucy missed running. She missed playing. Wait... Did she even miss school?

These were dark times indeed.

The sound of her parents down the hall drew her attention. They were figuring out what lessons to try and teach her next week. She dreaded that more than the evil-est, dark-est lord going. She didn't blame them for any of this. She wasn't daft. And they were trying their best; Mum was even pretty good at it. But they weren't any kind of replacement for Miss Mayhew, Mr Johnson, or Mrs Garrick. She hoped

they were doing all right, cooped up wherever they were, without any students to keep them entertained. Lucy knew if she was them, deprived of her company for so long, she'd go crazy.

She glared at those socks again. Wastes of space.

It wasn't all bad, Lucy supposed. The sky at night was full of stars, like she'd never dreamed of in London and even impressive by Ogmores standards. There were a lot of repeats, and the odd rerun of *The Billy Bandril Show* was far from welcome, but they were all watching TV as a family again every night, which was lovely. In fact, and this was coming from somebody who had been menaced by evil technology more than once, Lucy was finding herself more and more grateful to be living in the digital age. PE wasn't missed when you could exercise in your own living room with online videos and streams. Her favourite shows and writers were releasing special free content to keep their fans upbeat and excited, and they could all share that excitement online. And that was before you even got to 'Whoosh'.

Despite the fact she hadn't left her street for almost a week, Lucy had seen more friends and

family in that time than she had in ages, and it was all thanks to 'Whoosh' video chat. Her dad had walked her through it, and before long she was chatting to Conall and Dean, to Nick in his student house, to her old friends Ayesha in London and Grace in Cornwall, who she was really worried about until they spent an afternoon laughing so hard that drink came out of her nose; and of course she kept in touch with...

Her thoughts came full circle and something clicked in her head. Was it time yet? She looked at the clock. Had she moved it an hour forward? Or was it back? She'd travelled in time, so she really should have had a better grasp of daylight savings by now.

She spun, wheeling her chair over to her desk and checking her email for the invite. Yup, nearly there. You never know, maybe he had something. Anything to keep her mind busy outside of homework and home-worries. She could always count on him after all. He was her scientific advisor.

Logging into Whoosh Chat Window now...

Window scheduled for 12:30 – 13:15, 29/03/2020.

Would you like to upgrade to Whoosh premium for more time?

YES NO

Connecting...

Connecting...

HOBO: Lucy Wilson, as I live and breathe!
How long has it been? Have you done something with your hair?

LUCY: Don't make jokes, Hobo Kostinen.
I'm going stir crazy enough as it is.

HOBO: Sorry, I couldn't resist. And your hair does look a little... Off. How are you doing? Washing your hands? Not touching your face?

LUCY: Hobo, just because I can't hit you right now, doesn't mean I won't later. You sound like my parents.

HOBO: Very sensible people the Wilsons! This is important stuff, Lucy. Every little thing we do each day to keep healthy is helping everyone around us, in our communities, to keep healthy too.

LUCY: All right, all right... I'm doing it all,

and keeping socially isolated.

HOBO: Of course you are. You're a hero.

LUCY: Yeah, well, speaking of that, have you heard anything...?

HOBO: Lucy...

LUCY: I mean, I haven't, but you're in contact with those guys just as much as I am, so I thought maybe –

HOBO: No I haven't.

LUCY: Well, have you found anything then?

HOBO: No, and I'm not looking.

LUCY: What do you mean?

HOBO: Lucy, I appreciate times are tough right now, on all of us, and I know you want to do something to help, something proactive...

LUCY: Don't you say 'but'!

HOBO: BUT the best thing you can do, that all of us can do, is stay indoors. Apart from your family, the one's you live with, stay away from other people.

LUCY: *BUT* these wouldn't be people, would they? They would be alien monsters!

HOBO: Or nice aliens. We've met them too,

remember? What if we wound up giving one of them the virus? Who knows what that would do?

LUCY: OK, fair point, but – But – Do you honestly believe that because everything has ground to a halt in the real world that the things we deal with will have called it a day too? Do invaders take sick leave?

HOB0: If they have any sense yes.

LUCY: Oh, come on, when have we ever been that lucky?

HOB0: We're very lucky, Lucy. And not everyone is lucky enough to be able to stay indoors where it's safe right now.

LUCY: Oh. Oh, I'm sorry, Hobo. I didn't think. How is your mum doing?

HOB0: Not too bad. Patrolling the mean, deserted streets, doing her job. I'm used to worrying about her but usually it's... In a different way, you know?

LUCY: 'Course. I know what you're saying, it's just... We have a job to do too. We

can help and we will do it without putting anyone in danger, I swear. Just promise me you'll keep your eyes peeled?

HOBO: Fine. OK. Consider them peel— Huh. That's odd.

LUCY: What?

HOBO: Did you just get like a – like a glitch? In your video, I mean?

LUCY: Nope, you're coming through clear here. What's up?

HOBO: Hm? Oh, nothing then. Probably. Probably nothing.

LUCY: Hobo. You promised.

HOBO: What?

LUCY: To keep 'em peeled. Literally five seconds ago. I'm sure there's a rewind button on here somewhere...

HOBO: Look, just because some bad video feed glitches every now and then that doesn't mean that—

Hobo couldn't finish his sentence. He watched as Lucy's face jumbled in front of him, her eyes and

nose and mouth zipping off in all directions, and nearly fell out of his chair. He spun back around to find her filling the screen, face intact and full of concern.

‘Hey! You all right? Thought I lost you for a minute there.’

Hobo blinked, then peered at her, getting a little too close to the camera lens. She recoiled, probably put off by his zoomed-in eyeball, and there it was again. Like an after-image, a blur, just a little bit behind... ‘Fascinating,’ he said.

Lucy was frowning, all concern gone. ‘Did you hit your head or something? I know we’re in different houses right now, but come on, personal space.’

‘Lucy, remember when I said about your hair earlier?’

Her frown got a little closer to a glare. ‘Remember when I said about hitting you?’

‘But you don’t understand – it is off, just a little. And just then, after the glitch, your face went all...’ He tried to think of how to describe it, then wiggled his fingers in front of his face instead. ‘There’s a distortion too, if you move too quickly or in an

unusual way. It's almost like...'

He could tell Lucy was suppressing a smile. She could feel it coming. Maybe she always could. He envied her sixth sense for this stuff sometimes. 'Like what?'

'Like there's another you, laid on-top. A ghost image, copying you, but sometimes just a little too slow, and sometimes not looking quite right.' Lucy's smile grew wider and Hobo couldn't help getting a little cross. 'All right, all right, so maybe it's something, but there's no need to look so smug about it.'

'What do you mean?' Lucy said, still smiling.

'I mean the smile is a little overkill don't you think?'

'What smile?' Lucy said through the broadest grin. 'I'm not smiling.'

And then there were two of her, wriggling apart from each other, dividing out like the cells they looked at in science. There was Lucy, the tired, grumpy Lucy who had been cooped up way too long, and the other Lucy, the girl with the not quite right hair and the big, mad smile.

'Thank you for pointing out our mistakes,' the

other Lucy said earnestly. 'We will work on the hair, but it is awfully hard to animate so many strands.'

'Lucy?!' Hobo was up against the screen again. 'Are you seeing this?'

'What, my evil twin sister?' Lucy said, eyes fixed on the girl. 'Kind of hard to miss!'

The copy turned to look at Lucy, her face not glitching now but somehow still not right. 'Lucy Wilson,' she said calmly. 'You will be first.'

'First? First what?'

Before an answer could come, something in the room started glowing. Or Hobo thought it was – maybe there was a problem with the camera? It was hard enough to keep track of what was going on, between Lucy being hidden in the bottom corner of the screen and her double turning away from him. Hobo suddenly found himself really appreciating the work of good directors. He wished Spielberg or someone was there to hold the laptop and keep everything in view.

The light grew brighter and brighter until he had to wheel back, covering his eyes.

'Lucy?!' he called. 'Lucy, what's happening?'

But then the light cut off, with a jolly beep-beep,

and when Hobo was able to look, his connection had failed. 'No no no...' He was at the keyboard in a second, blinking away spots as he tried furiously to get back in touch with Lucy. It was no good. The link was gone and all he was left with was the view from his own camera: his room with him sitting calmly on his chair... Smiling.

Of course. It would have been harder for her to spot. He didn't have any hair.

The smiling Hobo leaned forward, as if to mirror the real one as he stared, but then it raised its arms, hands splayed open, and reached through the screen, grabbing Hobo's head. He cried out, trying to get a grip on the fuzzy digital hands as they began to pull him forward, into the screen, through the screen, and with a blaze of light he was gone.

Hobo had been through a lot since he met Lucy, but he'd never seen anything like this before. In an eye-blink he had left his room behind and was falling through space, buffeted by wind, his hoodie flapping out behind him like a cape. He was in a tunnel of wild, brilliant, kaleidoscopic lights, rings of orange and strips of pink looping around the

walls, tunnels of black and neon green shooting off in all directions. It was one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. He hoped it would stop soon. He was going to throw up in a minute.

In front of him, coming up fast, was a gate, sliding slowly open, an exit from the vortex. He braced himself for whatever impact may be coming, but he could feel that the laws of physics weren't on the same page here, wherever here was, so wasn't too worried about hitting ground. Then he was through the gate and could see the ground, and he panicked, throwing his arms up in front of his face before touching down lightly, not even losing balance.

'Huh,' he said, looking down at his feet, testing the floor beneath him. 'You know, despite being lost and alone and pretty freaked out, I could get used to...'

Hobo looked up and his train of thought shot away from him. His eyes widened and his jaw dropped. 'Oh. Maybe... Maybe not.'

The chamber he found himself in seemed endless. The walls, if they were there, were white and all blended into each other. Hobo could see the gate

closing above him and it might well have been floating in mid-air. All around, filling the endless space, were wheels within wheels, ticking cogs or maybe Ferris wheels of all sizes and colours, like the workings of a great machine. The ground he stood on was one of many floating island of different shapes and sizes, like discarded chunks of worlds. Every so often, ones and zeroes zipped by the edges of his vision.

Hobo nodded. 'Maybe not used to that after all.'

'You may have to try, human,' a throaty voice rasped from above and behind him. Hobo flinched, gathered himself, then turned with a glare. Despite his best efforts, he jumped at the sight of the thing. *Really*, he thought, *who could blame me?*

The creature hung from one of the great wheels. It was vaguely human-shaped – it had a head, arms, and legs, but everything was out of proportion, stretched far too thin. Its legs were short and tight, scrunched beneath it, but its arms were long and knotted, like cords wrapped around each other. Despite himself, Hobo pictured the Christmas lights he had to help his Mum untangle every year. Unlike those cables, these ended with big clawed hands,

sharp, long and red. Its head was so small by comparison, a little horned and haired shape with popping yellow and green eyes, and gnashing teeth.

‘Welcome to my world, little thing,’ it said. ‘I expect you have questions.’

‘Not as many as you might think,’ Hobo replied, doing his best Lucy impression to try and get his cool back.

‘Really?’ The thing leaned forward, and it was only then that Hobo noticed the little blue blobs that hovered next to it, each with its own wide staring eye. They glided closer, peering down as he peered right back.

‘I mean, I hate to burst your bubble... eye... things...’ Hobo decided this was a staring contest he wasn’t going to win, so turned back to the creature instead. ‘But you are far from the first creepy alien invader to try something like this with us.’

‘Alien? No, no, you do not understand, child. I am not from your universe at all. I am from a digital world, one of many here in cyberspace that brush up against yours as it continues to expand into our realm. What you call the Internet is in fact a...’

‘Wait, hold on.’ Hobo was forgetting to play it

cool. 'Did you say... Cyberspace?'

'Yes, foolish child. For what you call cyberspace is in reality —'

'But that's incredible!' Hobo spun on the spot so much it made him dizzy. He outpaced the circles around him, trying to take everything in and then take it in again. He gulped in as much digital air as he could, and was pleasantly surprised by how clean it tasted. 'That's, oh, I thought I was running out of things to be amazed by! I should know better, I really should!'

'SILENCE!' The anger of the creature made its rumble a shriek.

'Sorry, sorry, forgetting my monster-manners,' Hobo said, unable to stop his grin. 'You need to explain your evil plan!'

'We are not evil,' it snapped back a little too quickly. 'We are akin to what your people call...' A screen popped up alongside it's head, just for a second. Was he double-checking online? 'A computer virus. We will expand. We will corrupt. That is what we are.'

'Sure.' Hobo nodded, like that made sense. 'And that's why you've kidnapped us?'

‘Not kidnapped.’ The smile was in the thing’s voice as well as on its lips. ‘Replaced.’

Hobo remembered Lucy’s copy, his digital double. ‘You mean...’

‘Exactly!’ The creature may have been laughing, and its eye-spies joined in, bobbing out in the open space. ‘We have used the data you all put into your machines every day, the images you use to communicate now more than ever, and we have crafted our own “digital humans.”’ The last word caught in its throat. ‘It is not unlike your...’ It checked another screen. ‘Copy/Paste function on computers.’

‘Copy/Paste people...’ Hobo made a mental note of that.

‘We will rule by stealth and then by force. We will control all of your information, your ideas. We are the Meme Lords!’

Hobo blinked. ‘The what?’

‘Meme Lords! Yes, truly we are the ones who will – are you laughing?!’

‘No,’ Hobo lied. ‘No, good for you. *Meme Lords*... That’s... That’s...’ He couldn’t finish. He knew meme used to mean idea, but all he could see was

grinning dogs and people falling over.

‘ENOUGH!’

A clawed hand stabbed into the digital earth at Hobo’s feet. One of the Meme Lord’s arms had unravelled, shooting across the distance on the thinnest thread. Hobo decided to stop laughing. ‘We only let you live because we need to finish refining your copy!’

‘First...’ He made a show of thinking again, both to finish putting it all together in his head and to irritate the monster even more. ‘Lucy’s Copy/Paste person said she was first. And you’re right. Everybody is online right now, using “Whoosh” to keep in touch. You could replace the whole human race.’

Hobo wasn’t expecting the Meme Lord’s laugh. ‘You overestimate your people’s importance! We need not go to so much effort. We are simply replacing your heroes, the ones who protect you from things like us. We chose you two children first so we could start small.’

Hobo winced. ‘I wouldn’t let Lucy hear you say that.’

The Meme Lord ignored him, too far into his evil

plan to stop. 'And now we know the process is workable, in days we will have all of your protectors in our power! There are not so many of you after all.'

'Sorry, mate,' came a wonderfully familiar voice from behind Hobo. 'I think you've miscounted.'

'You!' the Meme Lord snarled.

Hobo turned and beamed up at Lucy Wilson, standing proud on a massive chunk of pavement floating above them both, doing her best heroic pose. The white space behind her was lost in shadow. For a moment, Hobo wondered if it was hers, just blown up to full superhero size.

'Sorry I'm late,' she said to him, ignoring the monster.

'I'm just glad you're here.' Hobo laughed. 'I was running out of ways to stall.'

'Stall?!' The Meme Lord really didn't like being ignored. 'You were not –'

'Hey, Lucy,' Hobo interrupted. 'Ask it its name!'

And suddenly it didn't want to be the centre of attention. 'That is not...'

'Sure, why not?' Lucy finally looked at the thing, still grinning. 'What's your name?'

'We – we have many names,' it stammered. 'In

our reality we are known as—’

‘No, the one you told me, just now,’ Hobo said with an encouraging gesture.

‘We...’ It gritted its teeth. ‘Are the Meme Lords.’

Lucy vanished for a second, collapsing in a fit of giggles that got Hobo going too. ‘You win!’ she yelled in between laughs. ‘I surrender! That’s too good!’

The Meme Lord let out a roar, unhooking its claw from Hobo’s feet and reeling its arm back in, aiming it now at Lucy. ‘Your copy is complete,’ it said, confidence creeping back into its voice. ‘We no longer need you alive...’

‘But don’t you want to know how I escaped?’ Lucy said quickly, raising her hands. ‘Or how are you going to be sure the next lot won’t do exactly the same?’

The Meme Lord froze, considering this. All his eye-spies did the same, frowning slightly. ‘You make a fair point... We will give you time to...’ Then something hit it, and all the eyes snapped open wide again. ‘Wait. How do you know of the others?’

‘I know because your little pals there dropped me off next to your address, book buddy,’ Lucy said

with a shrug. 'Got to be careful who gets a look at your contacts. I've been dishing some dirt on you, I'm afraid. And I managed...' She coughed. 'After a few tries, to invite more people into the group chat.'

And that was when Hobo realised what was behind her – a gate, like the one he came through. It creaked open and a mass of men and women came pouring out, joining Lucy on the front line. He recognised some of them, from the research he'd done into 'Lethbridge Stewart stuff'. There were those alien hunters from Cardiff. And those people from Ealing, who had protected Earth back when they were Lucy and Hobo's age. And there were Lucy's relatives, her family of heroes, and there was... Hobo's mum?!

'Foolish girl,' the Meme Lord spat. 'You think to win with the very force we were planning on holding here? You do our invasion for us!'

'No, you dumb virus, because you're not paying attention,' Lucy continued. And so did the people. More and more kept on coming. 'Like I said, you miscounted. Because right now, there are more heroes on Earth than you can manage.'

Hobo saw doctors and nurses in face masks and

scrubs. Followed by shop workers, bin men, delivery drivers, as well as police officers, like his mum, but then his dad was there too, and his brother, and so many more again...

‘I also found your Copy/Paste button,’ Lucy said with a grin. ‘It turned out to be pretty easy to use. Modern technology is so accessible! And I thought I’d teach you a lesson. Because these are scary times, sure, but we’re working through it. People are putting others before themselves and trying to help every day, from their own homes, sometimes without anyone to help them back. We’re all pulling together to save lives. Kids and parents and teachers and doctors and nurses...’ She looked at Hobo. ‘And police officers.’ Hobo looked at his mum again, then back to Lucy and they shared a smile and a nod.

‘No...’ The eye-spies flitted left and right, trying and failing to take in all of the people who emerged from the gate. ‘No, this isn’t right... Too much data...’

Lucy held her arms open wide. ‘These are the heroes of the human race. You’re welcome to them.’ The Copy/Paste people leapt from the platform, shooting toward the Meme Lord and its blobs like Hobo had shot through the vortex. It turned to flee

and in a second was lost from view beneath them all. Lucy hopped down herself, landing a little way from Hobo. 'Even when we're isolated, we're never alone.' She looked at him and smiled sheepishly. 'Too much?'

'Perfect,' he said with a beam, and Lucy had to hold up a hand to stop him from hugging her.

'Sorry,' she said quickly. 'But I don't really know if this is the real us in here, and better safe than sick, right?'

'Right,' he said, smile not even slipping a little. 'What did I say? Very sensible people, the Wilsons!' He looked up and around them. The eye-spies were all retreating, Copy/Paste people chasing them through the air, and the Meme Lord was nowhere to be seen. 'I know I should be asking you if you have any idea how to get out of here, but... Can we just take a moment?'

'I know, right?' She laughed, looking up and away herself, taking in the wheels and numbers and the sheer scope of it all. 'Cyberspace. Bonkers.'

'And all this from our bedrooms...' Hobo shook his head. 'All this...'

Lucy smiled, putting her hands in her pockets and enjoying the view. 'I guess the future's pretty bright after all.'

**FROM THE UNITED NATIONS ARCHIVE -
CLASSIFIED MOST SECRET**

**FILE# 161229 - BOTH AUDIO AND TEXT
VERSIONS ARE AVAILABLE**

**CONTENTS DEEMED HIGHLY SENSITIVE.
NOT FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION UNTIL THE
YEAR 2020**

**CERTAIN ITEMS HAVE BEEN REDACTED
FROM MESSAGE DUE TO THEIR HIGHLY
SENSITIVE NATURE**

Good evening,

The voice you are hearing is that of Brigadier
Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart of the... REDACTED.

The date is 4th May 19... REDACTED.

Now, I don't have much time. I've been reliably
informed that I won't be able to retain my recent
memories for long – something to do with time
streams being out of sync. Anyway, I shall press
on as best I can.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is perhaps my most
vital mission to date, and it has been entrusted
to me by my best scientist and most trusted
advisor, known to us all as ... REDACTED.

He, or was it she this time? Sorry, my recollection is getting a tad foggy already. *She* has notified me of a global pandemic that will sweep the globe in the year 2020. Although most will only develop minor symptoms from this virus, it is highly dangerous to those who are susceptible, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. This outbreak will also put a tremendous strain on healthcare services across the world.

In light of this information, I have been asked to relay this warning, so that you, my closest associates, are prepared and can help spread the following information when the time comes.

To those living in Britain, and who are not in front line services, the advice is simple. *Stay indoors, only go out for essential supplies, health reasons or for work – but only if you cannot work from your home.* Apparently, this is something many people can do in 2020! *When you do go out, stay six feet away from other people at all times, and remember to wash your hands as soon as you get home!*

I sincerely wish I could get word out today, but sadly the powers that be are not interested in indulging in the wild predictions of an ageing military man like me. In fact, they have strictly forbidden me from sharing this critical information. Nevertheless, I have decided to do what I can, I'm saving this message in the UN archives, and I will leave instructions for it to be

released in 2020 in case I am no longer here.

I realise that this will be a difficult time for all, for many it will be a battle against crippling boredom, so for my small part, I will be making some of my missions available for your perusal by the early 21st century. Hopefully these releases will prove insightful, and will help us improve our tactics against further incursions from outer space and across time. I also hope that they may even provide some entertainment during the challenging days ahead!

Before I end this recording, I just wanted to say... I'm sure there was something else I needed to inform you all of? Something to do with a world leader being replaced by a shapeshifting Scavorix. I was told you should be able to easily spot which one. But... No, I... I'm afraid it's gone. Never mind.

I wish you all the very best of luck. I know that together we will face down this challenge as we have done before, except this time it won't be against the familiar space skulduggery.

But for now, please remember this; staying indoors will save lives!
Stay safe everyone.

****END OF RECORDING****

Text discovered by Richard Brewer.