



Le Cirque D'Afrique, Notting Hill Carnival

At the end of the show, the buzz in the auditorium was high, and Joshua's group had only excited praise for their unexpected treat.

"All my FB friends are gonna hear about this. It was pure entertainment from the top to the drop! Even my dad woulda loved it, and that's sayin' a lot!" Brick said.

"How about coming backstage?" The Drummer Boy clown had left the cast and wandered over to Joshua and his friends.

"To meet Fetish, the magician?" Zion asked.

"For sure! But we have to go now." The Drummer Boy bowed and directed them into the adjoining area.

In the 'No Access' area Joshua again hung back, the earlier feeling of being uncomfortable still with him. Fetish showed off with sleight of hand tricks as they all laughed and chatted like old friends, Brick doing his best to include a stunning Somalian performer in their conversation.

"You seem very interested in our pneumatic platform." The clown spoke discreetly in Joshua's ear. "I could show you how it all works."

Joshua hesitated before remembering that this new information could be presented to Dr. Ogun and his ongoing assignments. "Okay," he said, finally admitting to himself how intrigued he was, "let's see what you got."

As they walked along Joshua's Smartphone buzzed informing him that his Fuzzy Particle app was vibrating. The diagnostic page had flashed up a dynamic graph which showed a horizontal line running from the Y-axis. It spiked like a heart monitor, but with no discernible pattern, it was like the audio read-out of a bass tune. Joshua stuffed his phone back into his pocket and wondered what the glitch could be.

"In here." The Drummer Boy clown parted a canvas door into what looked like an equipment room.

For a second Joshua considered telling Brick where he was going but decided against it, they wouldn't be away for too long anyway. On the other side of the canvas door, Joshua suddenly was aware that he was alone.

“Clown boy! You here?” His voice sounded hollow in the tent.

The clown had disappeared, and the flap doorway was gone too. He made a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree sweep discovering that he was surrounded by seamless grey canvas. He rubbed his palm over it. It wasn't pliable material to the touch; it was cold and unyielding as stone.

Joshua's heart began beating double time, the crown of his head tingled even as his RCT throbbed a furious red. His Smartphone had no reception, and the app in his pocket was beeping off the hook. Was he going insane? Hadn't he just come in through a doorway? Where had that gone? And the Drummer Boy clown why had he ducked out and left him?

Inhaling as deeply as he could several times, Joshua tried to calm himself although there were still beads of sweat across his forehead. There was nothing around him that he should be afraid of. He was in a storage room which looked like the cargo hold of ships that he'd seen in films. Stacked metal boxes were draped with thick cargo nets, and they were everywhere. A few props from the performances and other stuff were neatly positioned allowing foot traffic easy access to whatever they needed. A line of diffused fluorescent bulbs above blinked and added a menacing touch to the scene.

Again, Joshua caught his breath, determined not to panic. He should have known better, questioned all this.

His intuition was telling him, and he didn't listen. Even his Fuzzy Particle App. was telling him the circus had exotic energy, the same thing he used. The same thing the circus used too.

Joshua crouched down in front of one of the strong boxes brushing aside the cargo netting draped over it. On the machines, the surface was the pale blue, laser logo of Black Axis Technology (BAT). It cut into a crystal bathed in an umbra of black light. The circus and Black Axis, one and the same thing or was it pure coincidence? One of the largest multi-national companies on the planet was using a variety of technology that Joshua used.

He checked his RCT, humming weakly on his arm. His connection with it getting feebler by the minute. He lashed out in anger. It seemed that the canvas walls were closing in on him. He tapped his head but there was no sound from his Bees, they were quiet.

"I need some help Fam." He pleaded, rubbing his forehead with his thumb trying to massage life into his Bees and evoke a response from his dormant Encyclopedia Galactica, as Brick called his Data Stream, "come on bruv give me something, I'm trapped in here!" But there was nothing.

"Fine!" Joshua huffed. "I'll do it myself."

A crackling hum came from the other end of the room. His eyes snapped to the source of the sound. What now?

Ionized air tickled the back of his throat, and he could see the material of the canvas dissolve to reveal two symmetrical openings. Two men in bulky exoskeleton contraptions enclosing their head, back, chest and legs stepped through. Suddenly the two men shot up to over 20ft as their exoskeleton suits formed concertina stilts. They moved like giraffes, brandishing ugly looking weaponry that promised pain. From green-lensed goggles, they glared down at their surrounding looking for their prey.

Looking for Joshua.

Joshua ducked behind a set of crates stacked like a Tetris puzzle, his back flat against the irregular edges of the boxes.

“We need to talk, Joshua.” The deep voice echoed, making Joshua tense with apprehension. “My men will bring you to me.”

Questions filled Joshua’s mind. Who was the voice? How did he know his name? What did it want with him? He bit his tongue to keep his questions in check, banging his head rhythmically on the boxes in frustration.

“I want to know you better, Joshua,” the voice said calmly, his tone melodic and resonating like an opera singer. “How can I do that with you always running and hiding.”

“Who are you?” Joshua burst out, unable to contain his curiosity.

“Meet with me, and I will tell you everything you need to know.”

“Were you the one who wanted to hurt me and my friend at the museum?”

“Hurt, no!” The voice laughed. A strong, deep chuckle that could have belonged to a darker more diabolical version of Santa Claus. “Just testing your capabilities. You are a gifted boy after all.”

“I don’t believe you.” Joshua snapped. “What do you want from me?”

“That is the question of the moment, Mr. N’Gon. And to answer honestly, when I have you I will know.”

“You’ll have to catch me first,” Joshua shouted.

“A challenge? I love challenges.” The voice boomed.

From the eerie silence in Joshua’s mind came a CLICK! Joshua’s Data Streams seemed to snap on and the Heads Up Display only he could see, showed him a detailed schematic of the tribal Big Top. The image zoomed into his location highlighting in red, routes of escape; a, b and c

“About time, blood.” He whispered to the Data Streams under his breath. “No long talking, just get me outta here.”

The voice came again filling the space with a hypnotic note of confidence and menace.

“Save your strength, youngling. There is no way out.”

Joshua tried to ignore it and focus on what his RCT was telling him. It glowed green and tickled the inside

of his arm. The RCT bulked up becoming liquid metal, malleable and vibrating, as its shape and function changed. A command blazed in his head.

“Raise your arms!”

Like a puppet, Joshua’s arms shot up. Four blazing red disks flew out of his new form RCT.

“My personal drones.” He whooped. “Yes!”

Joshua sprinted after the disks following the brightly lit ‘A’ route, his vision an augmented reality overlay with arrows, notes, and calculations.

With a newfound energy, Joshua sprang over an obstacle course of crates, equipment, and boxes, executing smooth forward rolls as he hit the ground. With movements embedded in him from computer games, he launched himself at a rope his momentum catapulting him through the air. Gracefully he adjusted his trajectory, shifting his centre of gravity ready to land, just as a pressure wave smacked him from behind, snatching him from the rope to the ground. His head thumping and his vision blurred, he looked back at the stalking giraffe men and then at the crater caused by their weapons.

“So, you only want to talk?” Joshua’s shouted defiantly.

They took aim and fired again, the ground erupting in a soundless conflagration, sending him flying up in the air again and to the ground much harder this time. They rounded on him again, but this time he was help-

less. He was scurrying backward, when he heard the Clunk! Clunk! As two of the drones attached themselves to the Stilt-men. They brought their weapons to bear again but suddenly halted. Their suits lit-up from the inside with a crackle, and they froze in place. Joshua could see the men inside frantically trying to get out.

“You lose!” Joshua said half-heartedly, struggling to his feet. He had to keep going. His balance uncertain he ran full tilt towards the solid and impenetrable looking wall at the end of Route ‘A’. Above him, the red drones had dislodged from the Stilt-men and buzzed towards the wall at an incredible speed, a sparkling ion trail behind them.

The four drones attached themselves to the walls with a synchronized slapping sound, and they connected to each other via laser beams. Waves of heat emanated between the lasers which melted the wall leaving a ragged, dripping hole; Joshua’s escape route.

Three strides from freedom Joshua dove at the rend in the canvas. His body took flight through the hole and out to the other side. The discs returned to the RCT on Joshua’s wrist as he scampered away from the trap.

“All this just to get you alone?” Brick was barely able to keep his voice down.”

He’d gone looking for Joshua and found him a short distance away from the back of the Big Top.

“They underestimated us cos we’re kids,” Joshua nodded, “but they ain’t gonna make that mistake again.”

“They itching to interrogate you, Prince.”

“It’s gotta be more than that. There’s easier ways to link me up, bruv.”

“They realised who you are and what you can do. All because of Robot Wars. All because of me.”

“It was gonna happen sooner or later, might as well be now,” Joshua said.

“We can still enjoy our summer, but we gotta be careful.”

“We need to prepare everyone.” Brick glanced at the girls, thinking for a long minute. “You’re gonna have to tell her.” He jerked his chin towards Zion.

“I know.” Joshua sighed

“What made you suspect they were onto you?”

Joshua made a sour face. “My app.”

Brick cut him off.

“Whoa, back up! Your what?”

“My App, told me something was up but I ignored it. Guess I just didn’t believe anything at the circus could have triggered it.”

“Your App?” Brick repeated, making sure he had heard right.”

“It’s got zero commercial value, B. That’s why I didn’t tell you.”

“Let me be the judge of that, homie.” Brick snatched Joshua’s Smartphone and navigated through to the App. Shop mumbling about Joshua’s lack of business sense.

“After the museum, an algorithm came to me that I could use to detect exotic energies, the stuff given off by those bre’s who tried to capture us. I designed the app, so I wouldn’t have to wait on the RCT to help me when it felt like it. The data pinged from the antennas of other people’s phones like a radio telescope. It’s amplified by the app and interpreted in real-time, graphical form.”

Brick nodded sternly, still scrolling his way through the mobile pages.

“It’s in the App. Shop.” Joshua explained. “Exotic Particle Detector, \$50 a pop.”

“Pricey.” Brick said. Warming to the idea.

“That’s the point. No one will touch it. Hiding in plain sight, right?”

“Sweet Mama, Prince!” Brick nearly dropped the phone. “You’ve got over two thousand, four and five-star reviews from customers!” Brick did a quick calculation. “Do you realize you have over £100,000 in your account?”

“So maybe it’s worth something, bruv?” Joshua shrugged.

“Duh!” Brick said slapping his hand on his forehead. “You think?”