



GUARDIANS
THE AWAKENING

QAOTIC

AN INTERLUDE



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Chapter 1

ZUMA ROCK

Qaos paced impatiently across the stone floor of a chamber deep within Zuma Rock.

The space was a laboratory of sorts. The floor, walls, and ceiling were pure rock, and on one wall was an array of panels and controls, shelves, and cabinets with all kinds of advanced scientific equipment. There was also a perfectly flat granite worktop with what looked like a microscope.

Sitting at the worktop, peering into the microscope's eyepieces sat a strange-looking creature with pale skin and a large head; large even for a Qata-Qlysmi. It was another of Qaos' minions, its name was Qu.

'Well?' Qaos asked impatiently.

Qu swiveled on its chair.

'Lord Qaos. This is a delicate procedure that requires concentration and no interruption. The task you have given me has never been performed before. Perhaps if you...'

He swallowed the last of his sentence as Qaos cast a cold glare at him.

'Is the Sarauniya's blood useful? Yes, or No.'

Qu fidgeted with some notes.

'Yes, Lord Qaos. Most definitely yes. It offers opportunities in breaching her imperviousness, as well as...'

Qaos gave him a dark look and growled with impatience.

The creature cowered.

'It can make her vulnerable to your attacks.' It said in summary as Qaos resumed pacing.

'It can also help you trace her precise location.'

Qaos stooped pacing.

'Can it summon her artifacts to me... her Staff?'

The creature consulted his notes.

'No Lord Qaos. It is linked to her physical body only. It is really quite interesting, you see hemoglobin from the blood sample was examined by thin-layer isoelectric focusing in polyacrylamide gel plates containing an ampholine gradient of pH 3.5 – 9.5. PCMB treatment was effective in determining...'

Qaos growled.

‘You can also use her blood to open and close her teleportation portal and travel through it.’

Qaos pondered this for a moment then turned to leave.

‘I want to travel with the portal as soon as possible; whatever you need will be provided. But do not fail me.’

Qu fidgeted, Qaos noticed and turned to face him once more.

‘What is it now?’ He demanded.

‘Your genetic makeup is different from hers my Lord. The portal may not respond to you as it does her.’

Qaos paused.

‘What might happen?’

‘Without a live test, I cannot say for certain. It might respond unpredictably; it might even send you backward or forward in time. I need some more time to run more tests.’

‘Finish your tests by this time tomorrow, then open her portal and I will test it.’

Qaos said with finality, leaving the creature alone in the lab.

Chapter 2

ZARIA

Hadiza lay in bed at home. After the kidnapping, her mom hardly let her out of her

sight.

Buba had initially moved out after Hadiza had revealed what had happened and the role he had played in her ordeal. He was later arrested, charged for kidnapping, and was currently awaiting sentencing at Zaria maximum security prison.

'Hadiza...' Her mother's shrill voice pierced the silent afternoon.

'Na'am.' She answered, swinging her feet off her bed and putting on her flip-flops. As she did so her eyes fell on her ring. It had been normal since the incident at the treaty signing. Not a buzz, not a flash of light. She had begun to wonder if it had been damaged.

'Hadizaa... you have a visitor.'

'Yes mom, I'm coming.'

She bounced down the stairs and into the living room wondering who it might be.

Seated on the couch beside her mom was Corporal Ugochi. Hadiza had thought it might be a friend from school, come to see how she was doing. Corporal Ugochi was the last person she expected to see.

'Hello.' Hadiza said cheerily. 'How is Abuja. When did you get into town?'

'Just now, I've not even gone to the station.' They shared an embrace followed by an awkward silence.

'Let me let you people catch up.' Halima said as she left the room, sensing that they needed privacy.

Alone now, the corporal's countenance changed.

'Why have you been avoiding me Hadiza. You don't take my calls.'

Hadiza avoided eye contact.

'I've been busy... Schoolwork.'

'That's not true Hadiza. Did you think after what happened we wouldn't be watching you? You've not left this house in over a month.'

Hadiza sighed and turned to face her friend.

'I'm confused. I'm supposed to be looking for Sango and I don't even know where to start. And the ring isn't working. It hasn't told me anything since I came back home. And I miss Asabe; if

she were here, I'm sure she would know what to do. She would have some herb or concoction to make it work.'

'So, you haven't told your mom what happened.'

'No. She was so worried about the kidnapping, and Buba's involvement really hit her hard. I'll tell her later, not now. With all that's going on, I didn't want to add the Abuja angle to it.'

'Ok. I see your point. But you saved the president's life, using superpowers. You can't expect everything to go back to normal after that. Ring or no ring.' Corporal said soothingly.

'Yeah. I know.' Hadiza said with a long face.

'Guess who came to say hello. He's outside in the car?'

Corporal Ugochi said trying to cheer Hadiza up.

'Who?'

Hadiza asked, her curiosity piqued.

'Mr. Adebayo Dalmeida, the president's chief of staff. We came from Abuja together.'

Chapter 3

ZUMA ROCK

Qu bowed slightly as he handed a blood-red crystal to Qaos.

'How does it work?' Qaos asked.

'You simply place the crystal in this notch on your lance.' Qu pointed to a little groove. Qaos examined the little stone.

'So, this will open Queen Amina's portal? You're sure?'

'Yes. But there is a slight complication.' Qu replied.

'What complication.' Asked Qaos, his brows narrowing.

'The crystal will surely open Queen Amina's portal to you but... Given the differences in your physiological makeup... if my calculations are accurate... it will send you to a dimension, different from, but parallel to ours.'

'A parallel dimension?' Qaos asked. Visibly confused.

'Yes.' Qu exclaimed excitedly.

'For eons, the scientists of Qata-Qlysm have theorized that we live in just one of several realities, but Queen Amina's blood can cross from one to the other, proving the theory. This is what my tests have shown. The crystal harnesses this ability and makes it transferable.'

Qu stood, beaming like a little schoolboy.

'What happens if I encounter my other self in this parallel dimension?'

'Theoretically, nothing as long as you both do not encounter each other.' Qu replied.

'According to the String Theory theoretical framework, which describes how one-dimensional objects propagate through space and interact with each other...' Qu caught himself.

'If you encounter your other, do not stay in close proximity for an extended period, or you will both disintegrate.'

Qaos examined the crystal for a moment then he fit it in his lance; it aligned perfectly, after a few seconds it began to glow to a slow pulsing rhythm.

'Good, good.' Giggled an excited Qu.

'Now what?' Qaos asked.

'A small test. Enter the portal and exit quickly. Not until we know more.' Qu replied.

'Just open a portal like you normally do, it should take you to...'

Qaos vanished.

Chapter 4

ZARIA

'G'ood day sir.'

Hadiza said as she got into the black SUV that was parked in front of her house. She sat in the back beside Mr. Dalmeida while Corporal Ugochi got into the front seat, beside the driver.

The chief of staff dismissed the driver so they could be alone, then he turned to Hadiza.

'Hello, Hadiza. How are you? How's school?' He asked with a warm smile. He was genuinely glad to see her.

'Fine sir. How's the President?'

'He's fine and he sends his regards and thanks for your exploits last month, the first lady sends her affections as well.'

He shifted awkwardly in his seat.

'I'm sorry for not coming in to see your mom, this visit is meant to be discreet and I didn't want to draw unnecessary attention to either one of you.'

'No, it's fine.' Hadiza replied. 'I prefer it this way, there would be too many questions if she saw you.'

Mr. Dalmeida and Corporal Ugochi exchanged a glance. Hadiza noticed.

'Why are you here Mr. Dalmeida; something tells me it's not just to say hello.'

Another awkward shift.

'The president wants you to come to Abuja and work for him... for us. In a consulting capacity.'

Hadiza didn't understand.

'Come to Abuja? How? Why? What of my school and my mom?'

The chief of staff continued.

'It's totally up to you, but if you agree then we would work a transfer for you to the University of Abuja and relocate your mom as well.'

'What reason would I give her? Consulting capacity? Consulting in what?' Hadiza asked, her mind spinning, trying to process the proposition.

Mr. Dalmeida took off his glasses and cleaned them before answering.

'President Osuagbu is deeply concerned about last month's attack and what it portends for us as a nation, going into the future. The prospect of extradimensional beings being able to move amongst us, undetected, taking on any form, and manipulating people isn't something he can share with his own cabinet much less the wider government, but neither can we move on as if nothing happened.'

Hadiza was surprised.

'So, people don't know what happened?' She asked.

'Officially, no. By the time you confronted the aliens, the heads of governments along with their security and most of the media had exited the scene. A handful of staff at the facility witnessed the encounter but they have had a hard time convincing people that there was an alien attack in Abuja. They've since stopped talking.'

He sighed deeply then turned to face Hadiza.

'Do you think they're gone? You fought them. You defeated them. Do you think they'll leave us alone?'

Hadiza thought long and hard. She remembered the look on Qaos' face as he faded into his dimension with his wounded brother. It was pure malice.

'I don't think so.' She said finally.

'Then we can't sit idly by and do nothing. We want... Sorry... The president wants you to set up and head a task force that will seek and find ways to protect us from these aliens.'

Hadiza gave him a look of consternation.

'I'm just a teenager, sir. I cannot do what you're asking me. Lead adults; I can't.'

Corporal Ugochi reached back and grasped Hadiza's arm.

'Hadiza. You're not just any ordinary teenager. You have powers; I saw them. You saved my life and the lives of millions, even here in Zaria.'

Hadiza looked at her, tears welling in her eye.

'This is too much walahi; when the ring stopped working, I was happy. I thought maybe I could return to my normal life.'

The corporal rubbed her arm soothingly.

'Sometimes life throws responsibility at you without asking for your opinion. It's not fair, but it's life.'

'Erm... Sorry... Excuse me. What do you mean that your ring isn't working?'

Mr. Dalmeida interrupted, concerned.

Hadiza brushed a tear from her eye.

'The Ring hasn't responded to me since I got back home. I haven't been able to summon the staff or sword either. It's just there as if its battery died.'

She raised her hand, showing them the solid gold ornament. Then suddenly it shone with a bright golden glow that lit up the whole car.

Hadiza grimaced as power from the ring rushed through her.

After a few moments, the glow stopped, and everything returned to normal. Hadiza was sweating and panting heavily.

'Hadiza. Are you Ok?' Corporal Ugochi asked.

'I'm fine.' She replied.

'What did the ring say?' Asked Mr. Dalmeida. Aware of its ability.

'Qaos is back.'

'No.' The corporal exclaimed.

'Back where?' Asked the chief of staff, whipping out his phone.

'I have to tell the president.'

Hadiza screwed her eyes tight shut trying to understand what she had seen.

'He's back here but in another version of... here.' She knew she must sound crazy.

'What are you saying Hadiza?' Corporal asked, a worried look on her face.

Hadiza cupped her face in her hands and searched her mind for the answers the ring had hidden there.

'Qaos got some of my blood and used it to travel with my portal. He has gone to an alternate dimension of this realm, where Hadiza is not yet aware of who she is, and the staff is still hidden at Matsirga falls.'

She looked at Corporal Ugochi with fear in her eyes.

'He is going to try and get it.'

'I don't understand.' Mr. Dalmeida said. Flustered.
Hadiza gave him a strange look.
'I saw you there.' She said slowly. 'You're the president's chief of staff there too.'
'Chief of staff to President Osuagbu?' He asked further confounded.
'No. The president in that realm is a Fulani man.'

To Be Continued...