

ADE ADEPITAN

**CYBORG
CAT**

AND THE
MASKED MARAUDER

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CYBORG CAT



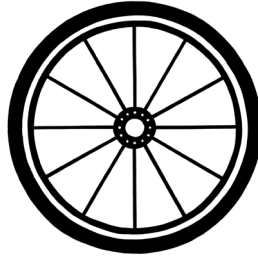
AND THE MASKED MARAUDER

Ade Adepitan

illustrations by Carl Pearce

Piccadilly
PRESS





1

A Very Rude Awakening

THE zombies were closing in. There must have been at least a thousand of them and the sound of their low, anguished moans followed me.

“Stay calm,” I said to myself but, as I turned the corner to find myself faced by a wall, a dead end, I knew that really wasn't going to be easy.

I had to act, and act fast.

I took a deep breath and focused.

1

A moment later I felt a familiar surge of energy from my chair. We were one, pulsating and humming with power.

Suddenly, I took off. I free-wheeled straight up to the top of the wall in the chair, then somersaulted backwards. I came down onto the heads of the approaching zombies and proceeded to bounce off them, splattering them one by one, as if I was in some sort of horrific pinball machine...

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

RING! RING! RING! RIIIIINNNNNGGGG!

I opened my eyes groggily. Was this part of the dream?

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

RING! RING! RING! RIIIIINNNNNGGGG!

No, there were no zombies anywhere. I wasn't in my wheelchair, and I definitely wasn't dreaming. In fact, I was wide awake and tucked up in bed.

“Aaaah! Aaaah! Who is banging on our door at this time on a Sunday morning?!” I heard Dad shout as he hurried down the stairs. “This had better be important.”

My dad was born in place called Ogun State in south-western Nigeria. Mum says the locals there are like the Bristolians of Nigeria because they have very strong accents. When Dad was angry or concerned his Ogun State accent became super strong.

I strained to hear what was happening as Dad opened the door.

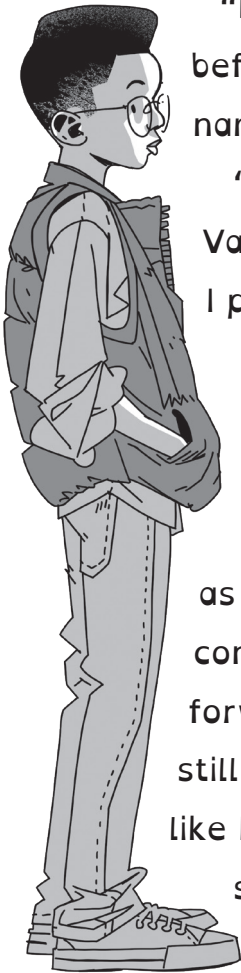
“Aaah, Brian! Have you won the lottery? Is that why you are banging on our door like a madman?”

“Erm, well, actually, no... Well, yes, but ... erm, could I see Ade, please, Mr Adepitan?”

Dad must have said yes because the next thing I knew Brian came bounding up the stairs and into my room.

“If you have won the lottery,” Dad shouted

after Brian, “tell your father I would like a new Ferrari, and maybe a year’s supply of moi moi! That should be enough to compensate for waking me up so early.”



“Hi, Bri—” I started to say. But before I could even finish saying his name...

“It’s gone. All of it! Gone! Vanished! Stolen! Every last penny! I put it –”

“Whoa, Brian, stop. Take a deep breath. What are you talking about?”

Brian blinked. It was almost as if I’d pressed pause on a remote control. He’d been talking in fast-forward and now he was completely still. Then, a moment later, it was like I’d pressed play, but at normal speed.

“Last night, after we’d

finished the car wash, I went home with the money we'd raised, thirty-six pounds and seventeen pence, and put it in the strongbox in the shed, like usual, with the rest of the money we've collected. And then I locked the strongbox. I definitely, definitely locked it. Definitely."

"Okay, Brian, so then what happened?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"Well, then I just went to bed and fell asleep."

"Brian," I said, as calmly as I could, "I don't mean what happened the moment after you locked the strongbox. What happened that made you come round here, trying to smash the door down at eight in the morning?"

"Oh, I see," he said. "Well, this morning I got up and went to check the strongbox and that's when I made my terrible discovery. All the money, all one hundred and eighty-six

pounds and forty-nine pee, has gone!”

“What?!” I shouted, now wider than wide awake. “How can that be possible?”

“Well,” said Brian, “I’ve given that a lot of thought and got it down to three possibilities. It could have been eaten by a hedgehog that used one of its spikes to open the box. Aliens who can pass through solid material might have taken it. Or it could have been stolen by someone who has the key.”

“I think it might be that last possibility, Brian,” I said. “But I thought you had the only key?”

“So did I,” he said. “But my mum says that make of strongbox uses the same key for all its boxes, which might explain why we got it for half price from the pound shop.”

“All the money!” I exclaimed, as the news began to sink in. “All the money! This is terrible.”

“Erm, yes,” said Brian. “But there’s something else.”

“What?” I felt like a punchbag that had just had all the air whacked out of it.

“It might be best if you see for yourself, Ade.”

“Yeah, the money’s definitely gone, no question about that.”

“Dexter,” I said. “I don’t think Brian asked us all to come round here just to confirm that the money has gone. *That* is what he wanted us to see.”

It was about fifteen minutes since Brian had nearly bashed my front door down and the Parsons Road Gang had gathered at the scene of the crime.

The ‘something else’ Brian wanted us to see was lying on the ground next to the open, and – as Dexter had correctly pointed out – empty strongbox.



"It's a clown mask," said Shed, stating the obvious.

"Well done, Sherlock Holmes," joked Melody, but no one was really in the mood for jokes.

"There's a folded piece of paper underneath it with your name on, Ade," said Brian. "I saw it when I lifted the mask up with my dad's spade."

"Why did you lift it up with a spade?" enquired Salim, asking the question that was on all our minds.

"Fingerprints, of course," said Brian. "This is a crime scene. Whoever stole the money has probably left their fingerprints all over the mask and that evidence will be a vital clue when it comes to solving this crime."

"What about the person in the shop they bought it from?" said Shed. "Their

fingerprints will be on it too.”

“Yeah,” said Melody. “And anyone else who picked it up to look at it in the shop, but decided not to buy it. That could be loads of people.”

“Yeah, Brian,” said Dexter. “But I have worked something out from the clues.”

“What’s that then?” Brian asked.

“You’re a silly sausage and an even sillier detective who couldn’t work out what day it is if you were looking at a calendar.”

“So what day is it then?” I said, jumping to Brian’s defence.

“Erm, well, it... I think... That’s not important right now,” spluttered Dexter. We all chuckled, but then quickly got serious again as Shed bent down and picked up the mask. Sure enough, underneath it there was a note for me.

My name had been written in green crayon. It looked as if a three-year-old had

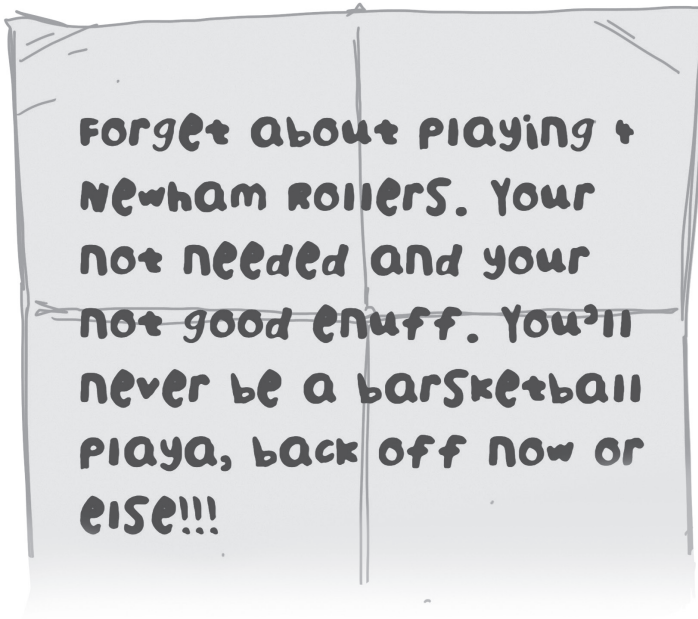
done it. As I stared at the big, chunky letters I could sense my wheelchair thrumming and my Cyborg Cat powers kicking in. The message I was being given was clear: this is not good.

“Go on,” said Dexter impatiently. “Read it.”

I picked up the note and, with five pairs of very wide eyes expectantly watching me, I



opened it. The same green crayon had been used to write inside it in weird letters of varying shapes and sizes. But it was what it said that really chilled me to the bone.



Underneath the message, this time in red crayon, was a signature.

THE MASKED MARAUDER

My chair was pulsing with energy. I looked over to the clown mask that Shed had picked up. I could hear it laughing madly at me, taunting me, challenging me.

Hahahahahahaha haaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Suddenly, the mask grew in size until it was touching the ceiling. As it towered over me, the empty eyes of the mask bore into my head and I began to feel dizzy and sick. My temples throbbed. I turned away quickly as a single drop of cold sweat trickled down my back.

There was no doubt about it.

I had a new nemesis.



2

A Big Match and a Missed Catch

Three weeks earlier...

“HANDBALL!”

“Dex,” I said. “We’re playing basketball, remember. You’re allowed to use your hands in basketball.”

“Oh yeah, sorry, I forgot,” said Dexter. “It’s just that in my head I keep commentating on the game as if it’s the Cup Final.”

“Must be the strangest Cup Final ever,”

Brian said. "How have you been ignoring the fact no one's kicking the ball?"

"Everything's strange in Dexter's head," chipped in Melody.

"Come on," Shed shouted. "Let's get back to the game. How about me and Ade take on the rest of you this time?"

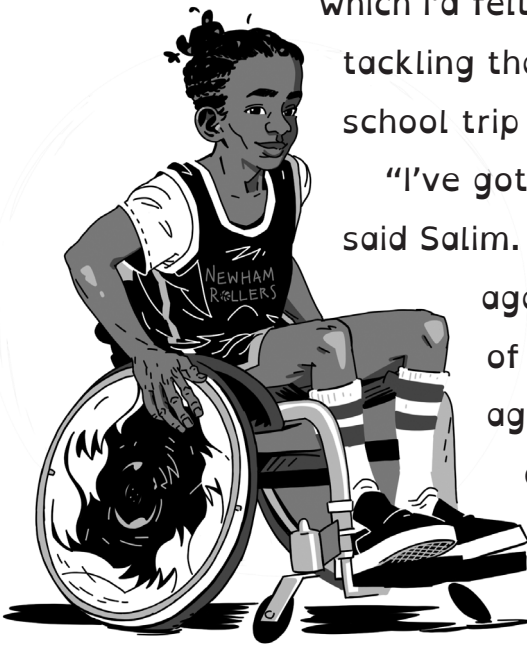
Two against four. I liked the sound of that. It would be a real test of my new skills in a wheelchair, not to mention my new powers,

which I'd felt growing ever since tackling that tarantula on the school trip to the safari park.

"I've got a better idea," said Salim. "Me and Ade

against the rest of you. Wheels against the good

old-fashioned two-leggers. What do you think?"



I really liked the sound of that. It wouldn't be easy, though, mainly because I was back in my really-not-very-sporty-at-all hospital wheelchair.

After the safari park trip, the headteacher had spoken to my parents and told them she was happy for me to come to school in a wheelchair. Dad had reluctantly agreed, but he still found it hard to accept. He couldn't quite let go of his Nigerian attitude that people in wheelchairs were at a big disadvantage and would struggle to get anywhere in life. However, he was adamant that he wouldn't let me use Salim's spare chair.

"We've never accepted charity, Doyin," he'd said. "And we're certainly not going to start now."

So I was lumbered with a heavy, brown, difficult-to-manoeuvre chair. It was nowhere near as mobile and cool as Salim's, but I'd

been practising all the tricks he'd taught me and I was getting more and more confident every day. And, of course, I also had my Cyborg Cat powers.

"That's silly. You'll have no chance," said Shed.

That settled it.

"Wheels against two-leggers it is then," I hollered, getting as close as I could to Shed and then swinging round to wheel behind him, before reappearing next to Salim. "Let's do this."

"Yeah," said Salim. "Bring. It. On."

We bumped the bars on the front of our chairs together. There was a metallic thud as they hit. Salim and I smiled. It was our way of doing a high-five. Then we turned and faced up to the other four.

"Game on," said Melody. "Dexter, just remember it's basketball not football. Use your hands, okay?"

“Yeah, don’t worry, the Cup Final in my head’s just finished,” said Dexter. “West Ham beat Spurs fourteen–nil. I scored a quadruple hat-trick.”

“Like that’s ever going to happen,” said Shed, a little sourly.

“Come on,” I said excitedly. “We’ll even let you start.”

I threw the ball to Brian, who just about caught it, and the game began.

Brian passed to Melody, who moved forward and to her right, bouncing the ball. As I went across to block her run, she passed to Dexter, who took the ball in his stride and tried to jink inside Salim, who was marking him.

Salim was quick, though, and stayed tight to Dexter, who looked up and saw Shed standing unmarked. Dexter threw the ball to him and ran forward, hoping for a return pass, but the ball flew past Shed and out into touch.

“She-ed!” shouted Melody, Dexter and Brian together.

“What?”

“You didn’t even try to catch Dexter’s pass,” said Brian.

“Yeah, and it was probably the greatest pass in the history of basketball, even a butter-fingered zombie could’ve caught it,” added Dexter.



“Sorry, I was miles away,” Shed apologised, looking sheepish.

“Don’t tell me you were playing a Cup Final in your head too!” said a somewhat exasperated Brian.

“Something like that.”

“Come on,” said Melody. “Get your head in the game; we need you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Shed, his eyes suddenly



lighting up. “Don’t worry. I got this, guys. I’m back, hundred per cent. Now let’s crush these two losers!”

Shed wasn’t joking. He played out of his skin for the rest of the game. He was their side’s top scorer by far, but Salim was in a different league to the rest of us. He played regularly for the Newham Rollers Under Fifteens, a local wheelchair basketball team, and his experience and skill helped us to win 48–36.

It was a good laugh, and by the end we were all drenched in sweat and gasping for something to drink.

“Come on, Dex,” shouted Brian as Dexter attempted to drink an Olympic swimming pool-sized amount of water from the water fountain in the park. “Leave some for the rest of us.”

“O – GLUG – KAY – I’M NEARLY – GLUG – FINISHED.”

A few minutes later we'd all quenched our thirst and started heading out of the park.

"You know, Ade," said Salim. "You've got some skills on the court. I've never seen anybody move so well. It's like you've got a natural connection with your chair. Normally it takes years to get that good."

I shrugged, slightly embarrassed by Salim's compliments. My chair made a low humming noise that only I seemed to notice. I'd discovered that the Cyborg Cat energy inside me could be transferred to whatever chair I was using. It felt good, but I knew I was only scratching the surface of my powers. I couldn't control them yet – sometimes they were there, and sometimes just gone.

"He's good at everything," said Shed. "He's the Cyborg Cat."

"Yeah, and Cyborg Cat's powers are limitless," chipped in Dexter.

“I don’t know about that,” I said. “I’m not sure I could take on an alien Tyrannosaurus rex with super strength and the ability to read minds.”

“Of course you could,” said Melody. “Especially with us backing you up. A mind-reading T-rex wouldn’t stand a chance against...”



She cupped her hands together, making her voice boom out loudly around us.

“... the incredible, the mighty, the unstoppable Parsons Road Gang!”

“Yeah!” we chorused, high-fiving and whooping and hollering like we’d won the FA Cup and the NBA Championships at the same time.

“I’m serious, though,” said Salim. “You should try out for our team. Coach Carlos is looking for new players in the Under Fourteens – I reckon you’d get in easily.”

“Yeah, you’d walk it,” said Brian. “Er, if you see what I mean.”

“I don’t know,” I said. “Dad’s still not very happy about the wheelchair. He’s worried people will make fun of me.”

Brian scratched his chin.

“Well, if you came to school in your wheelchair wearing that crazy pink suit again then that would be a source of great

hilarity," he mused, agreeing with himself and nodding vigorously.

"Yeah, that pink suit was jokes." Dexter chuckled, remembering the colourful outfit my mum had insisted I wear for my first day at Credon Road School.

"Ade, this is a great chance to show your dad what you can do," said Salim.

"Yeah," Melody agreed. "I bet he'll be pretty happy about what people think when you're being crowned player of the season."

"But what if I'm being crowned worst player of the season?" I said, suddenly unsure about my skills.

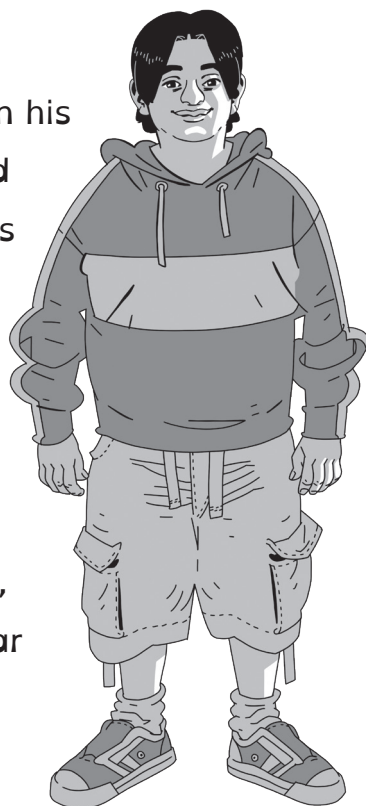
"I don't think there's a crown for being the worst player of the season," said Brian.

"There might be," said Dexter. "But it'd be shaped like a dustbin lid. Or a big curly poo."

We all laughed at the thought of that.

"What do you think, Shed?" I asked, turning round.

Shed seemed to be lost in his own thoughts again. His dad had lost his job a few weeks ago and even though no one actually said anything about it, we all knew it was making things difficult for Shed's family. He was one of my very best mates, though, and I wanted to hear his opinion.



"What?" he said, distracted. "Oh, yeah. The basketball team. Weeelll ... I, erm, I think it could be a good idea."

"That's great," I said.

"Oooorrrr," he went on, "it could be a bad idea."

"Thanks, Shed," I said. "You've been a great help."

"Come on, Ade." Salim wasn't going to

take no for an answer. “I know you’re good and I’m the best judge in the world. When your dad sees you scoring basket after basket he’ll change his mind, I’m sure of it. So what do you say?”

I stopped for a moment and shut my eyes, searching for my Cyborg powers. As I put my hands on the wheels of the chair energy coursed through my body. A moment later I felt a gentle but familiar surge as my chair radiated in harmony with me.

I opened my eyes.

“Let’s go for it!”