Fuzone presents…

MR MIDNIGHT

#61 – Deathmaster

I manually copied this book from the real book itself. It took days and sometimes even weeks for me to do this.

I hope you enjoy this book. Pass it around if you like. Sharing is caring.

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## Chapter 1

What would you do if you found a strange letter in your bag at school?

Did I say *strange?*

More like evil!

A letter so *terrifying*, and so full of *hate*, that your heart almost stopped beating?

Well, that’s exactly what happened to me. I was in class, and I opened my bag to take out a book, when my fingers brushed against a piece of paper.

I knew that it hadn’t been there when I packed my bag the night before. And I also knew that my bag hadn’t left my sight all morning.

 I frowned, wondering what it was and how it had got there.

So I pulled it out, unfolded it, and read the words that would change my life forever.

TO: NINA HU

*You will die.*

*You will pass from your world into mine.*

*You will be taken from the world you know, from all the familiar people you love, and nothing will ever be the same again.*

*You will see horrors and evil beyond anything you have ever imagined.*

*I will choose the time and the place for your departure. Your fate is in my hands.*

*You have no choice but to* OBEY *me.*

*Signed:*

DEATHMASTER

My scream shattered the quiet of our classroom.

 I fell back against my seat, my hands trembling, and the paper slipped from my fingers.

A babble of noise erupted around me.

I guess by now you know who I am. My name is Nina Hu, I’m a schoolgirl, and my horrors were just beginning…

At the next desk, my best friend, Chelsie Chua, dropped her pen with a squeal and peered at me over her glasses in horror.

“*Nina!*” she cried out. “*What is it?*”

Behind me, I heard Darren Tan scramble to his feet to see what had happened.

“*Hey, what’s up, Nina?*” he shouted. “*Did you see a snake?*”

Our teacher was calling for silence as he ran across the room. Poor Mr Quek! I’d never seen him look so startled, so *frazzled!*

“Nina! What happened?” he demanded. “Are you ill?”

“*The… the letter,*” I said feebly, pointing to where I’d dropped the piece of paper.

But it wasn’t there.

I leaped up in panic, searching under my desk for it.

But the only thing there was – the floor.

The letter had completely VANISHED!

# Chapter 2

Mr Quek was staring at me as I got up and tumbled back into my seat. “Nina, *what* letter? What are you talking about?”

“It was in my bag,” I tried to explain, squeezing the words out of my throat. “A letter… A *horrible* letter…” I let out a choked groan. “It said I was going to *die*…”

Mr Quek’s eyebrows shot up. He glanced under my desk, then straightened up.

When he met my gaze, his eyes told me that he didn’t believe me.

“I can’t see any letter, Nina,” he said patiently, sounding like he was trying to calm a raving loony. “What did it look like?”

I shrugged, my mind spinning. I mean, *what a dumb question!* A letter looks like a letter, right? Hadn’t Mr Quek seen a letter before?

“It was just a piece of paper, and it said I was going to die and I couldn’t do anything to stop it,” I babbled, hearing the first giggles from the rest of the class.

Mr Quek clapped his hands for silence, then turned back to me.

“Are you sure?” he asked sternly.

He was standing over me, his hands clasped behind his back, one foot tapping the floor.

“Are you quite sure the letter said that?” he asked in a steely voice.

“Yes, Mr Quek.”

“So where is it now, Nina? How could a letter just… disappear?”

I shrugged. In a small, thin voice, I said the only thing I could think of: “I don’t know.”

Mr Quek’s gaze scanned the class. “Does anybody know anything about this? Did any of you put a nasty letter in Nina’s bag?”

Nobody spoke.

“This is a very serious matter,” Mr Quek said. “It is not funny to write anonymous letters.”

And then the bell rang for lunch, and moments later everyone bolted for the door.

# Chapter 3

By the time I reached the cafeteria, I felt like a pop star. Everyone was mobbing me, shoving me, asking me questions.

“Nina, where did the letter come from?” asked my friend Dashwin.

“I don’t know!”

“It must have been someone very sneaky,” Dashwin said, then tried to cheer me up. “But don’t worry about it, Nina. I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

Then the Lims rushed up to me.

“Who’d want to kill you, Nina?” asked Donovan.

“I think it was a joke,” said Delaney. “Everybody likes you, Nina.”

Then Jerrick Teo and Jeremy Teong came up. They sit across the aisle from me in class. We call them JT1 and JT2.

“So did I,” said JT2. “And I saw you drop it when you screamed. But I didn’t see where it went.”

By then I was quivering with terror. Darren and Chelsie grabbed my arms and steered me toward an empty table.

“Are you hungry, Nina?” asked Chelsie.

I shook my head. “I couldn’t eat a thing. I think I’d throw up.”

“Nina, why don’t you check your bag again?” Darren suggested. “Maybe someone stole something and left that letter in there to fool you.”

“Or maybe they put more than one letter in your bag,” Chelsie whispered.

I scooped my bag into my lap and tugged on the zipper. It was very stiff and always made a loud, squeaky noise. Once my bag was open, I searched through it. Nothing was missing. And there were no more letters!

I pulled the noisy zipper around again until my bag was closed, and dumped it between my feet.

“That zipper needs oiling or something,” said Darren, staring at it.

“That’s one of the things I don’t understand,” I said, my shoulders slumping. “If anyone had even *tried* to open my bag, I’d have heard the zipper, right?”

“Unless you were away from your bag,” Chelsie argued.

“I wasn’t. I packed it myself last night. And then this morning on the bus, it was beside me all the way to school. And in class, it never left my side.’

Darren was still staring at my bag. “So what yo’re saying is –“

“What I’m saying is that nobody could have opened my bag without me knowing.”

“Then that means the letter just *got there*,’ Darren said, fixing me with a curious look.

“What do you mean?” I asked. A chill rippled down my spine.

“Well, if nobody put it in your bag, and if it just vanished when you dropped it in class, then it must be… well, you know, *ghostly*.”

“Darren, ghosts don’t write letters,” I bleated.

“I didn’t say they did.” Darren looked around, then dropped his voice. “What I’m saying is that if someone, or something, has the power to make a letter appear then disappear, well, maybe they *also* have the power to kill you.”

# Chapter 4

For a moment I thought I was going to faint. I felt my body falling, but Chelsie seized my arm and saved me. She glared at Darren.

“Stop saying things like that,” she snapped. “Can’t you see you’re scaring Nina? The letter wasn’t ghostly. Or supernatural.”

“I’m not trying to scare Nina. I’m just trying to solve a mystery.” He leaned across the table. “Nina, we’ve got to find out who the letter was from. Like, did it have a signature?”

“It just said who it was from” – I shuddered when I spoke the word out loud – “Deathmaster.”

“What?” Chelsie’s hand flew to her mouth.

“Who’s that?” demanded Darren, his eyes wide.

I trembled as I met his worried gaze. “How would I know? It just said I had to *obey* him.”

“*Obey him?*” Chelsie echoed. Her jaw went slack.

“But why would you obey someone who wants to kill you?”

“I don’t know.” I brushed hair from my forehead. “ I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I think it was just a sick joke, OK?”

“I don’t think it was,” Darren said.

“Darren, please don’t say things like that,” I pleaded.

“I’m trying to get to the truth,” he said firmly. “You don’t have any enemies, do you?”

“No, of course I don’t.”

“Then Deathmaster – whoever or whatever he is – isn’t anyone at school. He’s not a student. And he’s not a teacher. Therefore, he must be someone with… well, *special powers*.”

“Can’t we talk about something else?” Chelsie moaned.

But Darren pressed on. “Nina, tell us about the letter,” he said.

“It was just a letter,” I mumbled.

“Was it printed?” Darren asked. “Or written by hand?”

“I can’t remember.”

“You’ve got to try,” he insisted. “I’m sure I’d remember something as terrible as that letter.”

“Does it matter?”

“Well, it might give us a clue. I mean, if the message was written by hand, we might be able to help you recognize the writing.”

I closed my eyes, shutting out the sounds of the cafeteria, trying desperately to remember. The words danced before my mind.

“Printed, I think.” Then my eyes flew open. “No, printed by hand. In ink. In *pale* ink.”

Chelsie squeezed my arm. “What color ink was it?”

I closed my eyes for a moment, focusing my mind on the letter. “It was very pale. Red…” I hesitated, and my eyes opened again. “No, not red, but pink. Pale pink. Like the color of… of *old blood*.”

Chelsie gasped, but Darren’s eyes lit up. “Ah, now we’re getting somewhere. So the letter was printed by hand in pale, faded, blood-colored ink.”

Then I sat up straight as though lightning had shot down my spine.

“Nina! What is it?” Chelsie squealed.

“I’ve just remembered something else,” I told her. “About the paper.”

“What about the paper?” Darren asked eagerly.

“It felt strange. And kind of old. Really old.”

“Like that paper we have in art class – The one we use for writing scrolls – *parchment*, right?” Darren queried.

I snapped my fingers. “Yes! It was like the letter had been written in blood, a long, long time ago…”

# Chapter 5

For a while my friends were silent. Chelsie stared at me curiously, her head on one side. Darren met my gaze, deep in thought, and for an instant I thought I could see his mind processing what he’d heard.

Then he swung into action.

“You’re giving us lots of valuable clues. I’d better write them down before I forget them,” he said.

He reached for his schoolbag and fished around inside. When he pulled out a pen and a piece of paper, my eyes fastened on the paper.

“Where did you get that?” I gasped.

He glanced at the paper and shrugged.

“It’s scrap paper,” he said. “I always keep it in my bag. Why?”

Then his eyebrows shot up as he examined the paper more closely. “It’s parchment!” he cried.

Chelsie snatched it from him excitedly. “It must be a letter – just like the one Nina got.”

“Nobody’s been near my bag,” Darren snapped, trying to snatch it back.

But Chelsie had already unfolded it. Her mouth sagged, and her eyes bulged.

“Darren,” she said in a strangled voice. “It’s from him! It’s the Deathmaster!”

She passed the letter across the table, and Darren held it open for us to read:

TO: DARREN TAN

*You think you can escape death, but you can’t.*

*When I am ready, I will claim you as my own.*

*You will be unable to prevent my final victory over your life.*

*You will face endless death and blackness of pain forever.*

*Be warned.*

*You have no choice but to* OBEY *me.*

*Signed:*

DEATHMASTER

Darren’s face went slack. His hand trembled. “I don’t understand,” he said hoarsely. “How did it get into my bag?”

“It’s just like the letter I got,” I whispered. “Deathmaster can put messages anywhere he likes.”

Chelsie pointed at the lettering. “It’s printed, just like the way you said yours was written, Nina. And you’re right – the ink is weird too. It doesn’t look like ink. It looks kind of like… *thin blood*.”

“An old person’s blood,” added Darren breathlessly.

“Or a letter that was written a long time ago,” I suggested. “And that’s why the ink is so faint. It’s faded.”

Darren wiped perspiration from his forehead. “Well, one thing’s for sure. It’s not from anyone at school. I mean, nobody I know uses words like that.”

I took the letter from Darren and studied it carefully.

“And the paper isn’t parchment either,” I said, fingering the paper. “It’s too thick. Too heavy.” I tried to tear off a corner but couldn’t. “I’ve never seen paper like this, have you?”

Chelsie let out a cry. “Maybe the paper wasn’t made here.”

Darren shot her a startled glance. “What do you mean?”

Chelsie’s cheek flushed. She replied in a small voice, “It sounds crazy, I know, but maybe it came from a *different world*.”

We gaped at her.

“And if the paper *did* come from a different world,” she went on, “then maybe Deathmaster does too, and that’s why he can put things in people’s bags without them knowing.”

“You think Deathmaster is an… an *alien?*” I almost swallowed the word.

“Either an alien” – Chelsie’s cheek blazed crimson – “or a *ghost*.”

Darren pounded on the table with his fist. “But why is he picking on us? And what does he mean by… ‘You have no choice but to OBEY me?’”

I was staring at the letter when a sudden gust of wind whipped around me. It tore the paper from my grasp and carried it high into the air.

A moment later, it was gone.

# Chapter 6

We were on our feet at once, trying to figure out where the letter had gone.

“That’s the second time that’s happened,” Chelsie said in a hollow tone. “First your letter vanished, Nina, and now Darren’s has!”

“The letters *always* vanish,” muttered Darren. “But *why?*”

“It’s like deathmaster doesn’t want anybody else to see them,” I speculated.

“That is just so creepy,” Chelsie commented. “He gives you a letter, then takes it back!”

Darren swung around to face us. “And I think I know why! It’s been taken back so we can’t trace the paper. And we can’t identify the ink or the printing.”

“So maybe I’m right,” Chelsie said grimly. “Maybe he is an alien or something weird like that.” She hesitated, then tensed. “And that would explain something else. He put your names on those letters. And he knew whre to find you. Doesn’t that mean he has some kind of strange power?”

“You mean he’s *spying* on us?” I asked.

“He *must* be!” Chelsie exclaimed. “Otherwise how would he know your names, and what school you go to?”

“But what does he *want?*” Darren demanded. “Why would someone with special powers send weird letters to schoolkids like us?

“Well, we know he wants us to obey him,” I reasoned. “He keeps telling us we have no choice but to obey him. It’s like he’s trying to scare us into doing what he wants!”

“But what *does* he want us to do?” Darren asked angrily. “Why doesn’t he just come straight out and tell us?”

“Maybe he will,” I argued, “when we’re scared enough.”

# Chapter 7

“*Nothing!*” Chelsie squealed a few minutes later.

After Darren and I had found those letters in our schoolbags, I’d said to her, “Chelsie, maybe you should check your bag.”

Her face darkened. “Nina, you don’t think Deathmaster sent me a letter too, do you?”

“You’re our friend,” Darren reminded her. “If he’s spying on us –“

He didn’t have to say any more.

Chelsie unzipped her bag and searched it warily. Books, notebooks, pens, a ruler, a pair of unwashed socks, a comb, and a mirror piled up on the table until her bag was empty.

A smile of relief flooded her face.

“*Nothing!*” she squealed.

“You are *so* lucky,” I told her, squeezing her hand.

*Well,* I thought, *Deathmaster has targeted only Darren and me!* But why? What made us so important to him? And what was he going to make us both do?

A shudder passed through my body.

I heard the bell ringing for class. It seemed to be coming from a place far away.

I pushed myself to my feet, wishing the day had never begun.

Later that afternoon, Chelsie and I went upstairs to the school library to work on our history project. As we climbed the stairs, Chelsie took my hand.

“Nina, I don’t know what to say. You and Darren have both had those sick letters, but I haven’t. I feel kind of bad about it.”

“You mustn’t. It’s just our bad luck, I guess.”

“I don’t care who Deathmaster is, or what he is, I promise I’ll help you,” she said fiercely. “We’ve got to stick together!”

I squeezed her hand and thanked her. *It was great to know I had a friend like Chelsie.*

In the library, we were led to a shelf of books in the corner. “You’ll find what you want here,” the librarian said before returning to her desk.

We left our bags on the nearest table and searched along the row of books. No sooner had Chelsie chosen one than she gaspd in horror.

I spun around. A folded sheet of paper had been tucked into the book she was holding. Her eyes were fixed on it, her lips trembling.

“It’s from him!” she whispered. “It’s the same weird paper!”

We sat down at the table, and she opened the letter. Deathmaster’s message was printed by hand in the same faded pink ink, the color of old blood:

TO: CHELSIE CHUA

*I have not forgotten you.*

*You too will cross over into my world at a moment of my choosing.*

*Say farewell to all you know and hold dear.*

*Your departure into death has been planned. Every detail has been taken care of. How I look forward to the day when you become mine.*

*You have no choice but to* OBEY *me.*

*Signed:*

DEATHMASTER

Chelsie’s hand was trembling, her gaze held hypnotically by the evil message.

“It’s just like the letters you and Darren got,” she whispered in a hollow voice. “He wants me to obey him!”

I stared at the letter. “How could Deathmaster have known we were coming to the library?” I wondered numbly.

“And how could he have known *which* book to put the letter in?” Chelsie asked. Her eyes met mine. “It’s spooky… it’s like he knows where we’ll be and what we’ll do before *we* do!” Her terror intensified. “You know what this means, Nina, don’t you? He’s not *human!* He *must* be a ghost or alien!”

I began folding the letter.

“We’ve got to show it to Darren before Deathmaster makes it disappear like the others,” I said urgently.

Suddenly I pulled my hands away.

The letter was becoming too hot to touch.

Seconds later, it burst into flames.

By the time the startled librarian had reached our table, the letter was nothing more than a pile of smoldering ash.

# Chapter 8

“ Nina Hu! How dare you light fires in the library!” the librarian shrieked. “You could burn down the whole school.”

“Miss Clara, we didn’t light a fire,” I tried to explain, but she was in no mood to listen.

“You don’t expect me to believe that the fire just started by itself, do you?” Her eyes blazed angrily behind her thick glasses.

“Well… it did…”

I sank back into my chair. I knew she wouldn’t believe a word I said. In fact, I still couldn’t believe what had happened myself.

Chelsie jumped to my defense.

“Miss Clara, there was a piece of paper in one of the books,” she began. “That’s what caught fire.”

“Paper doesn’t set itself alight,” Miss Clara said adamantly, hands on hips. “It needs silly girls like you to make it catch fire. Now, open your schoolbags!”

But after she’d searched through our bags and we’d turned out our pockets, she looked confused.

“*Something* must have set it on fire,” Miss Clara mumbled.

“Maybe the piece of paper had been in that book too long and kind of got hot,” Chelsie rambled.

“Chelsia Chua! There is definitely no such thing as spontaneous combustion in my library!” Miss Clara almost screamed. She stared at the ash on the table. “Stay where you are while I clean up the mess.”

She returned a moment later with a small dustpan and broom. She tried to sweep the ash into the dustpan, but it clung stubbornly to the table.

“How odd,” she remarked.

She set down the dustpan, her gaze locked on the pile of ash. Reaching out her hand, she touched it with her fingers.

With a squawk of horror, she withdrew her hand. Her fingertips were covered with a thick, black, sticky substance like oil.

We left her there and headed down to our classroom. Chelsie’s trouble gaze met mine.

“Nina, I was right,” she said hoarsely. “That paper wasn’t paper. Well, not like any paper *we* have.”

I almost lost my footing on the stairs. “You think it came from somewhere else? *Like another planet?*”

“Well, you saw it. It looked like melted plastic or something.”

“But it couldn’t be,” I protested.

“It was something we don’t have,” Chelsie insisted. “Some kind of paper that aliens use. And when it burns, it turns into black goo.”

“If you’re right, then Deathmaster comes from somewhere else,” I said, forcing down the urge to scream.

“If I’m right, Nina,” Chelsie said in a small voice strained with terror, “then Deathmaster has more power than we thought. And that means we may have no choice. We may *have* to obey him!”

# Chapter 9

After our final lesson that afternoon, we took Darren aside. We found a quiet place under the stairs where we could talk without being overheard.

I began by telling him everything that had happened in the library.

“It caught fire?” His jaw dropped. “How could he make it do that?”

“I don’t know,” I told him. “I could feel the paper getting hotter nad hotter, and then it just burst into flames.”

Then Chelsie described what had happened when Miss Clara tried to clean up the mess.

“It wasn’t ordinary ash,” she said. “It was black and sticky.”

Darren leaned back against the wall. “So if it wasn’t ordinary ash, the paper wasn’t ordinary paper,” he breathed.

“Chelsie is sure that Deathmaster is an alien,” I said.

“He’s really freaky,” she burst out. “He seems to know everything we do, even before we do it.”

Darren was silent for a moment before he looked at us. “Do you think we’re the only ones in the school getting these letters?” he wondered out loud.

Chelsie shrugged. “How can we find out?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Darren admitted. “I suppose we can’t go around asking people they’ve had letters from Deathmaster. They’ll think we’re nuts.” His jaw tightened. “But if we *are* the only ones he’s sending messages to, that means we’re in… well, *danger*, I guess, and nobody else knows.”

I tried to control my alarm. “Then we’ve got to do something about it. Don’t you think we should talk to our parents?”

“But would they believe us?” he countered. He let out a loud, angry sigh. “That’s why Deathmaster is so clever. He makes the letters disappear or burn as soon as we’ve read thm. We can’t show them to anyone else. We can’t prove they ever existed.”

“What about the police?” asked Chelsie.

“What about them?” Darren answered with a wave of his hand. “Without the letters, no one is going to believe us. They’ll all be like Mr Quek. They’ll say we’re making it up.”

Then he stopped. “Hey, there’s something we haven’t thought about,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“Maybe we won’t get any more letters.” His face brightened. “Maybe we’ll never hear from him again.”

“Do you really believe that?” probed Chelsie.

“Well, what if those letters were just some kind of sick joke?” Darren retorted.

“What if they weren’t?” I challenged. “What if he really wants us to do something for him? What if he’s going to make us obey him?”

“Then he’ll have to write more letters and tell us what it is.” Darren hesitated. “Or he’ll have to appear in person and tell us.”
We gaped at him.

“It’s bad enough getting his letters,” Chelsie blurted out, “but I don’t want to *see* him. I don’t even want to *think* about what he looks like.”

We picked up our bags and walked to the bus in silence.

# Chapter 10

After my friends got off the bus, I rode on alone to my apartment block. I gazed out the window at all the familiar streets and buildings that I saw every day of my life. The shops, the signs, the scurrying people. All the things that I took for granted would always be there.

Deathmaster had said he was going to take me away from the world I knew.

“*Nothing will ever be the same again…*”

That’s what he’d said in his letter.

“*Nothing will ever be the same again…*”

I shivered.

My world, my life as I knew it, would vanish forever, and not a single soul could help me.

*But why?*

Why had he chosen Chelsie, Darren and me?

That’s the question my mind kept returning to.

Why us?

If he was as powerful as we believed, why had he chosen three schoolkids like us to terrorize?

What did he want us to do?

Why did *we* have to obey him?

Then a new thought began forming in my mind. If nobody could help us, maybe we could help ourselves.

*Maybe there was a way we could trap Deathmaster!*

I had no idea how we could trap an alien or ghost, but maybe we could find a way to keep his next letter before he destroyed it. If we could do that, then we’d have something to show other people. *Then we could get help!*

I was still thinking about that when I arrived home.

Mum met me at the door with a happy smile.

“Hi, Nina, guess what?” she asked. She held up an envelope. “You got a letter today.”

I stared at the envelope in her hand.

“Well, aren’t you going to open it?” she went on eagerly, fingering the envelope. “It looks interesting. It must be an invitation to someone’s birthday party.”

I snatched the letter from her hand and ran to my room.

*I knew it wasn’t an invitation!*

Deathmaster had printed my name and address in that same pale, blood-colored ink. Somehow he had been able to buy a postage stamp and mail this letter to me.

I threw down my bag and, with fumbling fingers, tore open the nvelope.

Inside was a single sheet of paper.

The same mysterious paper that Deathmaster always seemed to use.

And on it was printed one word:

SOON

# Chapter 11

My scream split the air. Mum was at my door in seconds.

“Nina, what is it? What happened?”

I held out my hand to show her the letter.

“Nina, what’s the matter?”

“Look!” I said breathlessly.

She stared at my hand, her expression blank. I followed her gaze.

My hand was EMPTY!

And that made me scream again.

Mum rushed to my side. “Nina, why are you screaming?”

All I could do was stare at her mutely.

“Was it the letter you received?” Mum asked. She cast her gaze over my desk. “Where is it?”
“It’s gone,” I mumbled.

“But I just gave it to you. How could you lose it so quickly?”

My shoulders slumped. “Mum, I didn’t lose it.”

“Well, where is it?” she demanded.

“It just… vanished.”

“Nina, you look so pale. There must have been something in that letter that upset you.” Mum arched an eyebrow. “Who was it from?”

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves. “It was scary. It said I was going to die.”

“Nina, if anyone sent you a scary letter, your father and I will go to the police with it.”

“Thanks, Mum,” I said shakily, slipping into my chair.

“I think you need a good night’s sleep. Have you got much homework?”

I nodded. Then I shook my head. Then I nodded again. My mind was reeling.

Mum retreated to the door. “Nina, I’ve got to finish cooking. Your father will be home soon. Are you *sure* you’ll be all right?”

When she left, I snatched up my mobile phone and called Chelsie. She answered on the first ring. Her voice was thick and tense. I told her about the letter.

“Oh no!” Her voice cracked. “You too. I got one as well.”

“What did it say?”

“It was the same as yours. Just that one word. ‘Soon.’ And then it kind of melted into nothing in my hand.” Fear strangled her words. “What did he mean? Is he going to kill us *soon?*”

“I don’t know.”

*But I did know.*

Whatever he was going to do, he was going to do it soon.

I tried to comfort Chelsie, then called Darren.

“Yes, that’s what mine said too,” he told me when he heard about Chelsie and me. “And then it just vanished into my hand. Like it kind of *evaporated!*”

“We’ve got to get help!” I shrieked.

“But nobody will believe us,” he reminded me. “We’re on our own.” Then his voice brightened. “Anyhow, Deathmaster won’t know where to find us tomorrow.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hey, have you forgotten? We’ve got a field trip tomorrow. We’re going to that science museum.”

My spirits lifted immediately.

*Yes!* I thought, *Darren’s right*.

We’d have a day away from school, away from our usual routine.

And we wouldn’t be taking our schoolbags, so Deathmaster would have nowhere to leave his letters.

We’d be going somewhere that Deathmaster didn’t know about.

Somewhere he couldn’t find us and torment us.

Well, that’s what I thought.

Little did I know that we were going to the place that Deathmaster had selected many weeks before…

# Chapter 12

We wandered through the science museum, our eyes goggling at all kind of displays. It was like stepping into future.

Our teacher Mr Quek led the way from one section to the next.

“All these scientific wonders have a message for us,” he was saying. “What do you think it is, Nina?”

I hesitated. I hated it when teachers asked me questions like that!

“They show us how far man has come,” I blurted out, my fingers crossed. “And how much he knows.”

“A good answer,” Mr Quek said. “But more importantly, they also remind us how much we *don’t* know… of how many discoveries we have *yet* to make. And when we *do* make them, nothing will ever be the same again.”

*Nothing will ever be the same again…*

The words struck a chord of fear in my mind. But only for a moment. Soon the next section of the museum absorbed my attention.

We had entered a vast planetarium showing us the solar system, galaxies with stars I’ve never heard of, and a wall of films recording manned spaceflights.

“Hands up everyone who believes in aliens,” joked Mr Quek.

No hands went us. Everyone laughed, except us.

We passed through the planetarium into a huge room dominated by a life-size replica of a space capsule. A steel ladder led up to its door.

“This is a replica of a capsule used in the American space program,” Mr Quek informed us. “There is room for only three to go in at a time,” he explained.

“So Nina, Chelsie, and Darren, you can be our first astronauts.”

We climbed the ladder and entered the capsule. It was so cramped that we could hardly move.

“Where’s the toilet in this thing?” Darren asked.

“There isn’t one,” Chelsie giggled. “They give you a tube and a bag instead!”

“Yuck!”

Suddenly the lights flickered and died. The planetarium was plunged into darkness. We heard screams and shouts from outside.

“Darren!” I yelled. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t touch anything,” he yelled back.

We could hear Mr Quek’s voice calling out in the darkness. “There’s no need to panic. Stay where you are. It’s only a power fault of some kind. The lights will come on again.”

There were more screams and shouts, and ours were the loudest because the space capsule had begun to vibrate wildly.

“It must be Deathmaster,” cried Darren.

“He found us!” shouted Chelsie. “He’s here!”

The capsule shook violently as an invisible force wrapped itself around us, pulling us into blackness.

# Chapter 13

A voice was speaking.

“You see, there are certain faults in the Earth’s atmosphere, similar to the faults in the Earth’s crust. It was through one of those faults that I knew I could reach you at the science museum. And a parallel fault connected me with your school. It was very simple, really. All I had to do was plant the seeds.”

“What seeds?” I heard Darren ask from somewhere in the black zone.

“I had to prompt one of your teachers to organize a field trip. I planted a seed in his mind. He did the rest.”

“And the letters?” Chelsie’s voice sounded terrified.

“They were nothing. They were merely projections from my mind into yours. Images that appeared to take a solid form. They didn’t actually exist.”

“But one of them caught fire in the school library,” Chelsie said.

“You thought it caught fire. And you thought you saw that sticky substance. It was all in my mind, and therefore in yours, and the minds of those around you.”

“What about the letters you mailed to us?” I asked.

“I projected them into the mind of your mailman, and in your case, Nina, into the mind of your mother. She thought she gave you a letter. You thought you read it. And you thought it vanished from your hand. As your teacher rightly told you, there is so much that man does *not* know.”

Darren’s questions penetrated the blackness. Try as I did, I couldn’t see him!

“Why do you have to reach us through faults in the Earth’s atmosphere? I don’t get it. Where are you? Are you an alien?”

The voice of Deathmaster replied, “I am not an alien, although I am not part of your world. I am in a place that you might call the Afterlife.”

“So you’re a ghost?” Chelsie asked.

“No. In order to be a ghost, I would to have lived and then died. But I have never lived. The living are my toys. I manipulate them.”

“Like you manipulated us?” I screamed.

“I am very good at manipulating people and events. Human life has always been a balance of good and evil. I manipulate evil.”

“We’re not your toys!” Chelsie screamed at him. “And we don’t care what you want us to do! We’re not going to obey you.”

Deathmaster laughed softly in the blackness. It was a sound that chilled my bones to the marrow.

“Why can’t we see you?” Darren shouted. “Why are you hiding from us?”

Deathmaster’s words lashed out from the darkness. “Darren, why are you in such a hurry to look upon the face of evil?”

“Show us who you are!” Darren retorted.

The blackness lifted like a mist.

And for the first time we were face to face with Deathmaster.

# Chapter 14

DEATHMASTER!

I did not know where to look first!

The creature that occupied the cavern was shaped like a spider, its massive legs – ach the thickness of a fully grown tree – writhing in dozen different directions at once.

Its body was the size of a whale.

Several immense heads with clusters of glowing eyes were attached to its shiny black body, which pulsated like a bloated heart. The heads were rotating slowly.

None of the heads and eyes were directly focused on us, though I sensed that each of them was observing our presence.

A slit in the creature’s guts opened and closed like a fleshy mouth. Its breathing echoed around the cavern, an eerie, rhythmic sigh, like the moan of a breeze in a vast forest.

A web of steel bars, like a gigantic cage, enclosed the entire mass.

Each bar appeared at least a meter thick.

A heavy lock secured the bars in place. It looked to me that once the lock was open, the bars would spring apart.

None of us screamed.

The terrifying spectacle robbed us of all breath.

Deathmaster spoke.

“As you can see, my enemies have me trapped and I am dying. That is why I have brought you here. You will find a key on the wall behind you. You must unlock the cag so I can be free again. You are the only one who can do it.”

I gathered enough breath to say, “After all you’ve told us and done to us, why should we help you?”

“Because you have no choice but to obey me. If you do not do as I say, you will die with me.”

# Chapter 15

Darren stared at the mammoth creature. Sarcasm replaced shock.

“Who said you’re dying?” he challenged. “You were still able to do all those things to us.”

“With the last of my powers,” Deathmaster said. “My death will be slow, as yours will be if you do not release me.”

“You said your enemies trapped you,” Chelsie said. “Who are they?”

“Some forces for good,” Deathmaster sneered. “They lured me into this place and snared me. But if they were good, as they profess themselves to be, how could they kill?”

I turned and saw a golden key hanging from a hook on the wall. In the dim light, the key glowed as though it had a life of its own.

“If we let you out, what will happen to us?” I asked.

Deathmaster’s head revolved so that several eyes were focused on me. I felt as though I were being hypnotized and drawn into the cage with the monstrous creature.

“You have my word you will not be harmed in any way,” he promised.

Chelsie grasped my hand. “Once he’s free he’ll kill us,” she whispered. “He doesn’t care about us. He’s evil.”

Deathmaster had heard her. “Then I say you are evil too,” he accused. “You are no better than I am. How can I overcome my nature and do good if I am denied the chance?”

“Do you expect us to believe that?” I asked. “One moment you say we’ll day, the next you say you want to change your ways.”

“Then we must all die together. If you deny the chance to change the world, it will be on your conscience. But remember, Nina, because I know so much about evil, think how much good I could do.”

Deathmaster fell silent.

And that was when I realized I was having trouble breathing.

# Chapter 16

“Something’s happened to the air,” I cried.

Chelsie tried to take a deep breath but couldn’t. Suddenly she gripped my wrist. “That’s it! That’s how they’re killing Deathmaster,” she said. “They’re taking away his oxygen. He won’t be able to breathe.”

“And neither will we,” I pointed out, aware of the perspiration forming on my forehead.

Darren shook his head. He glared at the mammoth creature in the cage. “No,” he said suspiciously, “I think it’s a trick. I think Deathmaster is the one who’s stealing all the air! He’s sucking it up somehow. He’s trying to trick us into letting him out of there!”

“No, he’s not. Look!” I shouted.

We stared at Deathmaster. Death appeared to be claiming him.

He was slowly shrinking.

One by one his massive legs were withering.

His sleek black body was wrinkling.

An agonized moan escaped from his gruesome mouth.

“Nina… the key…” he pleaded with his last air.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. Deathmaster reminded me of the spider that Dad had once sprayed with insect killer. The spider’s legs had curled up, it’s body shrinking into a black ball. The same was happening to Deathmaster. He was immobilized, slowly curling up to die.

“He *is* dying!” Chelsie gasped. “What are we going to do?”

I fingered the key on the wall. Its golden surface was surprisingly warm to my touch – the warmth of life, I thought.

“Nina, don’t! You mustn’t,” warned Darren.

“But if he dies, we’ll die too,” I argued.

I made my decision.

I took the key from the wall with trembling fingers and flashed a glance at Deathmaster.

All his heads and eyes were directed at me. It seemed he was waiting for me to unlock the bars. He was trusting me to save him.

Instead, I turned to Darren and Chelsie.

“Let’s find a way out of here,” I said. “And let’s take the key with us.”

Deathmaster suddenly sprang back to his mammoth size. With a deafening roar, he hurled himself against the steel bars with the force of a hurricane. The bars shook violently but held.

“The key, Nina!” he bellowed. “Open the lock, Nina! Let me out now!”

But we had already left the cavern.

# Chapter 17

“I thought you were going to let him out,” said Chelsie.

“So did I,” agreed Darren.

“No,” I told them. “I wanted to test him. I wanted to see if he was telling the truth. The moment he saw I wasn’t going to help him, he became evil again.”

We were back in the space capsule, and the lights in the planetarium had been restored.

After leaving Deathmaster in the trap, we had found a tunnel leading from the cavern.

After a few paces, a light had appeared before us, and something gently lifted the key from my hand.

“There are many Deathmasters, Nina,” a voice said. “Destroy one, another appears. For that is the nature of evil. Destroy it once, and it returns. Be vigilant.”

And then the light vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared, and we fou dourselves back in the capsule as though nothing had happened.

A moment later, Mr Quek’s anxious face appeared in the doorway. “Are you all OK in here?” he asked.

“There was a short circuit. It’s been fixed now.” He gave us a closer inspection. “I hope you weren’t too scared in the dark.”

“Scared?” I responded with a laugh. “Don’t worry about us, Mr Quek. We had plenty to keep us busy.”

MR MIDNIGHT #61

Deathmaster

END

I hope you enjoyed the story, readers.

Look out for the next story at <http://readmrmidnight.weebly.com/>!