

ONYEKA

AND THE HEROES
OF THE DAWN

PROPERTY OF



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MASOBE

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For Elizabeth and Rebekah, my joy and inspiration.

*For my parents, thank you for feeding me a
consistent diet of sci-fi growing up.*

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CHAPTER 1

‘Why can’t you close your mouth when you chew?’

Adanna’s annoyed voice booms across the cabin of the Gyrfalcon, the supersonic jet we use for special missions. Hassan stiffens guiltily next to her.

‘Half eaten plantain chips is not something anyone needs to see,’ she adds.

Hassan’s face tightens, his Ike power making his dark skin flicker ominously. Only the lighter patch of skin round his left eye stays visible.

‘Make you close your eyes,’ Hassan replies in Pidgin English. ‘If you no wan see how I dey chop.’

‘I can’t close my ears though,’ Adanna grumbles back. ‘You sound worse than Onyeka when she’s worried.’

With her empath powers, Adanna’s like an emotional

lie detector. Her Ike gives her the power to hear and smell people's feelings so she's always snitching. I'm only half listening though and don't catch Hassan's response. I'm too busy worrying just like Adanna said. It's all I've been doing since my dad told me about the new Solari he found. The one we've been tasked with retrieving.

We're supposed to bring him back to the Academy of the Sun, the special school for genetically enhanced humans called Solari just like us, that we recently liberated from our corrupt head teacher Dr Dòyìnbó. I know Papa thinks I'm ready, but I don't feel it.

A thick strand of hair flops into my face and I push it away with an impatient hand. A tingle spreads across my scalp as my Ike powers up, and I know without looking that my hair is floating behind me, just like it does whenever my emotions are close to the surface. The front is still growing back after it was cut during our showdown with Dr Dòyìnbó, and the shorter strands keep escaping the bantu knots I usually have my hair styled in.

'The Solari isn't in Nigeria. He's in England.'

Papa's words race through my mind again for the millionth time, but I'm no closer to making any sense of them even now that we're on our way to Bristol.

'What do you think a Solari is doing in Bristol?' Niyì asks, as if reading my mind.

His question pulls me out of my jumbled thoughts and

I look up to find four sets of eyes pinned on me. Dressed in matching green and gold battle suits with a flaming gold sun emblazoned on the front, the four kids staring at me are so much more than they appear to be. They're Nchebe, guardians of the Academy of the Sun, but more than that they're my best friends.

Zahrah, the newest member and oldest at fifteen, is wearing an impatient expression as usual. A stray orange braid falls across fiery red eyes and she brushes it away quickly. I'm surprised she's kept her hair this colour for so long, she's always changing it.

The sudden news of our mission barely phased Zahrah or the tall boy next to her. It's our first one since we were sent to help a remote village in the Cross River Province after the Iko dam burst. The mission ended with us losing our memories of everything that had happened, so I'm surprised Niyi's excited about our latest task. He's practically bouncing around like a happy puppy. He and Zahrah are total opposites, right down to their powers. Where Zahrah shoots fire, Niyi is all ice.

Hassan scoops up another handful of plantain crisps and shoves them in his mouth. His hand flickers out of view briefly signalling his anxiety. I don't think anyone else noticed, though. Okay . . . Adanna probably did. Her eyes narrow at Hassan. How she's even able to sense his emotions with all the other ones flying about the jet, I'll never understand.

'Hello?' Niyi repeats. 'Solari . . . Bristol?'

I shrug. ‘You were at the briefing too. I don’t know any more than you.’

‘Come on,’ Niyi scoffs. ‘Your dad is on the Lower Council. He must have all the intel.’

There are two Councils that run Nigeria, an upper and a lower one. Papa joined after we defeated Dr Dòyìnbó, but he never tells me any of its official business.

‘You know as much as I do,’ I insist. ‘There’s an eight-year-old Solari living in England with two guardians and it’s our job to—’

‘Yeah, yeah, collect him,’ Niyi finishes for me.

‘Well, we also know his name is Tobi, and we know what he and his guardians look like thanks to my dad’s investigation,’ I remind him. ‘Lastly, we know his address.’

‘But that’s strange, right?’ Niyi asks. ‘Why is he living in England instead of Nigeria? Is it to protect him or . . .’ Niyi’s voice trails away because we’re all thinking the same thing.

Is it to protect others?

An uncomfortable silence settles. It’s weird enough that Tobi is in England and no one knows why. Aunt Naomi said they only discovered Tobi’s existence after finally hacking into the files Dr Dòyìnbó left behind after his arrest. It’s one great big mystery, and I hate mysteries. I’ve had to deal with way more of them than any kid should and they never end well.

Just look at Dr Dòyìnbó and his crazy plot to use AOS as a training ground to brainwash Solari into becoming his

personal army. Or my dad and his creation of a serum to cure the deadly disease that threatened all Solari. Though, to be fair, without that particular mystery I'd still be miserable in England with my mum, clueless about my powers and missing my dad. So maybe they're not all bad.

It feels strange to be away from the academy though. We've only just settled back in after our triumphant return with the Òmìnira. They're Solari too but we used to call them Rogues until we discovered that Ògá Gbénga, their leader and Zahrah's father, was also trying to take down Dr Dòyìnbó. Things are good now. Dr Dòyìnbó is locked up, and Solari have been cured from the disease that almost wiped us out. We're finally united . . . sort of.

Things aren't exactly perfect at the academy, but like Adanna and my childhood best friend Cheyenne like to remind me, they don't have to be. My parents are back together, I'm surrounded by amazing friends and I'm even enjoying school. I'd really like my life to stay that way. It's why this mission has me so nervous. It feels like it could mess everything up.

'I think it's a test,' Niyì announces suddenly. 'Part of our training to join the Solari Force.'

'There's a flaw in your logic,' Adanna says. 'I'm not joining the Solari Force.'

'Me sef, I no go join,' Hassan agrees.

Niyì's face drops. 'I can't believe you guys don't want to be involved in something so special.'

Niyi thinks the Solari Force, a voluntary group set up by Ògá Gbéngá and my dad that's tasked with protecting Nigeria, is the greatest thing since the Internet. It's not yet active, but he's already signed up to the four-year training programme.

Adanna rolls her eyes. 'I'm already part of something special. I'm helping to set up the new technology building at AOS. There are other ways to use Ike that don't involve going on secret missions and fighting. Our solar tech is great, but we need to keep innovating our technology to keep Nigeria safe.'

Niyi looks at Adanna like she's speaking a different language, and Hassan laughs before giving him a gentle shove.

'Ada is correct.' A soft smile spreads over Hassan's face and I know he's thinking about the class of little he helps Professor Salako teach. 'I go join the Councils for future.'

'You'd make a good Elder,' Zahrah says softly, and Hassan's smile widens.

'Will you join the Councils like your father?' he asks.

Adanna throws Zahrah a sly glance. 'Or maybe take up that medical internship I saw you checking out the other day. I could smell your interest from across the room.'

Zahrah's expression twists for a second, like she wants to throttle Adanna, but it quickly evens out as she turns to Niyi and gives him a cheeky look.

'The Solari Force is going to need help if *he's* planning on joining.'

'Hey!' Niyi cries before he clocks that Zahrah's messing

with him. ‘Whatever,’ he adds in a huff. ‘I can handle anything you can.’

I stare between the two of them. They have such a weird dynamic. One minute they’re laughing and working out together in the gym, and the next they’re trying to blast each other’s heads off with their Ike. The last time they clashed during training, their combined Ike created a steam fog so thick it set off the sprinkler system and we had to evacuate the building. Adanna reckons it’s because they’re both testing each other’s boundaries.

‘Are you going to join, Onyeka?’ asks Zahrah.

Before I can answer, the Gyrfalcon’s alert system sounds, and DAMI, the AI that controls the jet and everything at the academy, speaks. *‘We will arrive at our destination in ten minutes.’*

Ten minutes? It feels like we just left Nigeria! Niyì stands up immediately as he and Zahrah busy themselves getting ready. Hassan is busy too, polishing off the last of his snack. Adanna leaves him with an exasperated sound and takes the empty seat beside me.

‘You’re nervous.’

I give her a look. There’s a new Solari out there and no one knows anything about him. Of course I’m nervous.

Adanna shakes her head. ‘I mean about returning to England.’

I blink. I’ve been so busy trying to figure out what Tobi’s

existence means, I totally forgot about that part. I don't actually know how I feel. England never truly felt like home, and now that I've left there's nothing tying me to it. Even Cheyenne and her family have moved to Nigeria. She goes to a local boarding school now and we see each other all the time. Still, England is where I grew up and where most of my memories were made. It's a part of me . . . whether I like it or not.

'A little bit.' I finally push out.

Adanna nods in understanding. 'Here, you'll need these.'

She pulls out a pair of tiny metallic discs from a side pocket in her battle suit – another one of her inventions. She's been tinkering with it for weeks, but every time I asked about it, she said I should mind my business.

'Is it my business now?' I ask with a cheeky smile.

Adanna kisses her teeth at me, but there's no real bite to it. 'You know I don't like talking about my inventions until they're ready.'

'What is it?'

Adanna smiles, her dimples flashing. 'Second Sight, phase two.'

I stare at the discs in her hand, confused. When I look back up, she's grinning so hard that her eyes have a little crinkle between them. That's when I realize she hasn't got her pink Second Sight frames on. Adanna never goes anywhere without them. The augmented glasses add a virtual level of detail to

everything we see and they help us communicate with each other. Seeing my confusion, Adanna points to a spot on the side of her head, just above her ear. That's when I notice the small metal disc attached there.

'It connects directly to your brain and sends messages to your optic and auditory nerves. We'll be able to share visual and audio data much easier now and I've added telescopic vision and a properties analyser.'

I grin back, impressed but clueless about what it all means.

Adanna hands me the discs. 'The others have theirs on already.' My face falls and she kisses her teeth again. 'Don't give me that look. It's not my fault you were lost in your thoughts when I was handing them out.' She has a point, so I fix my face.

'Thank you,' I say as I take off my frames and place a disc on each side of my head. Almost immediately a tingle begins in my body. Then my vision goes black and I stiffen.

'Don't panic,' Adanna cautions. 'It's just calibrating.'

She could have warned me sooner.

Slowly, the darkness clears as my vision returns, and the inside of the jet and Adanna come into focus again. I blink. Everything seems brighter somehow . . . more defined. I lift my hands and turn them, noticing how every line and fold almost glows with a sharp quality.

'It's strange at first, but you'll get used to it,' Adanna reassures me.

Already I can feel the brightness dimming a little as the strange glow fades, but something's still off. It's like there's a shiny filter between me and the world. It feels artificial and wrong somehow.

'Is this safe?' I ask slowly.

Adanna frowns at me. 'It's the future.'

That doesn't really answer my question, but before I can push it, a new alert sounds as DAMI's voice fills the jet again.

'We have arrived at our destination. Holding in place until further instructions are received.'

We all snap to attention and quickly gather round the landing platform. We decided to leave the Gyrfalcon in the air, hidden in stealth mode. There aren't exactly a ton of places to park a supersonic jet in the middle of Bristol.

I look around at my friends, each one so different but united by our shared mission. Despite my worries, we're a team, and as long as we stick together, I know we'll be fine.

'This is our first mission with all five of us together,' Adanna says.

She's right and the knowledge soothes the nerves bubbling inside me.

Niyì nods. 'Let's do this.'