



NIGHT ZOOKEEPER

Prologue

The Lord of Nulth

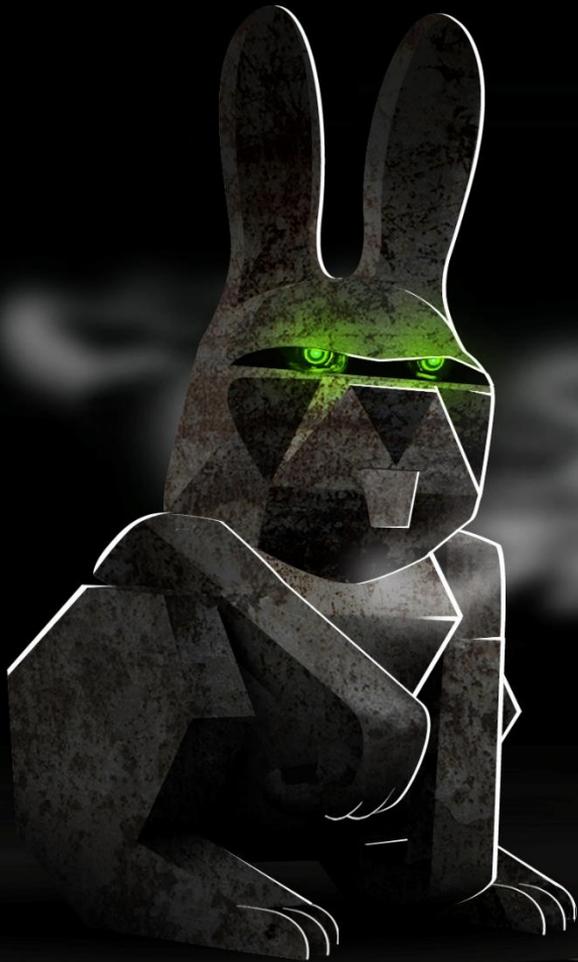
The Lord of Nulth, a tall man with eyes darker than rain clouds and grey dreams, looked out across the World of Night. He wasn't a happy man and he had no imagination or sense of humour but what he saw through the window made him smile. One corner of his thin, straight lips curled up like the ring pull on a can of fizzy pop and he let a short snort escape from his pointed metal nose.

Outside there was nothing but the darkness of Nulth. There was no grass, no oceans, no rivers and no deserts. No mountains, no caves, no forests and no jungles. You couldn't have jungles without trees after all, and most of the trees were now nothing but great billows of smoke; pouring from the ash grey chimney, of his battleship grey factory.

The World of Night, once full of moonlit beauty, was emptied. The Lord of Nulth had declared war on imagination and won.



His army, Voidbots powered by the mysterious dark force called Nulth, had destroyed anything original or magical in their path. He, the self-proclaimed Lord of Nulth, was nearly satisfied. There was almost nothing special or different left in the World of Night.



Voidbots, mechanical spiders with insides as black as Nulth, scuttle up the factory stairs dragging a grey sack with something kicking and screaming inside.

“What have you found?” says the Lord of Nulth in a voice that could send a shiver up the spine of an Invertebrate.

“An animal trying to run away. It confessed that it wanted to get to the Night Zoo sire.” Says one of the Voidbots.

“There is no more Night Zoo!” The Lord of Nulth declares as he walks around the sack like a hyena circling a baby zebra. “You should have stayed in your cage little one! It would have been much safer for you.” As he says this he kicks the bag and a scream of pain comes from within.



“There can’t be many animals left now sire.”
The Lord of Nulth seems to reflect on this for a second.

“There, there.” He says, taking obvious delight in the terror felt by the animal in the sack, as he runs his powerful, sharp metallic fingers over the fabric. Then all goes silent as he slowly opens it and peaks inside. A pink liquid immediately shoots out and covers his face. A laugh of delight comes from the bag.

“END IT!” The Lord of Nulth shouts as he wipes his face and spits the liquid onto the metal flooring. “AND SOMEONE CLEAN THIS UP!”



The Voidbots rush to clean the floor and then drag the grey sack from his presence, eager to escape any further outbursts of rage.

Left alone the Lord of Nulth looks out of the window again. In its reflection he spots a huge purple elephant with a strange symbol on her head standing behind him. Her skin is old and wrinkled and it seems as though an entire universe of stars are contained within her mammoth hide.

“Oh, it’s you again. I know you are not real you know.” He says without turning around. “Sooner or later I will stop seeing you and then...” his voice trails off as a single black tear rolls down his cheek.

The elephant just stares at him with big, sad eyes. This angers the Lord of Nulth. Spinning around he shouts angrily at her, “Listen, why do you still come here?! It is over. Nulth has won. There is no more light in the World of Night!”



The elephant begins to fade from view as the Lord of Nulth, in increasingly desperate tones, continues; “You left me! You abandoned me when I needed you most. Where are you going?! Come back! Come back and face me! Guards! Guards! Seize this elephant!”

The robotic spiders race back up the stairs but the elephant has all but vanished and there is nothing to see. A look of concern for their lord seems to play across their faces whilst he searches around in desperation, finally spotting the elephants tail, floating in mid-air, about to disappear completely. He reaches out just in time and holds tight.

Chapter I

Sunset

Hello! A very good evening to you. I am the Night Zookeeper and you must be my new recruit.

Welcome to my zoo. To be honest it's not really my zoo, but at night, when everybody is asleep and it's just me and the animals, I like to believe that the zoo is mine.

You see, at night when the Day time Zookeepers leave to go home to their families, they turn the care of the animals over to the moonlight and me.

What the Day time Zookeepers don't know, is that at night, magic transforms this zoo. The walls of the animal enclosures melt away and the animals live in a place where anything is possible.





Would you like to come with me on my night time rounds? We will travel deep into the heart of the Night Zoo and you will see the magic for yourself.

However, you will have to be as quiet as a little field mouse and as big and brave as a lion. If you can manage to be both quiet and brave whilst we discover the animals in the zoo, you can become a Night Zookeeper like me and together we will meet more magical animals than you can ever imagine.



BANG! BANG! ALARM!! ALARM!!....

Oh don't worry about that sound, I think you can ignore it. I'm sure it's fine. I have only worked here as a Night Zookeeper for a few weeks and I have heard that alarm sound occasionally. I am still not sure why it goes off, but I think the first animals on my night round might know. These are very tricky creatures, in fact they are some of the most difficult to look after, because I keep on losing them!

Come with me and, if you're very quiet, I will introduce you to the Spying Giraffes. "What are Spying Giraffes?" you ask. Well I may be the only Zookeeper in the world who can tell you.

The Spying Giraffes are spies that keep their watchful eyes over all of the nocturnal happenings in the zoo and they know all of the zoo's secrets. (Of which, there are a great many!)



These giraffes can hide anywhere because they are the best spies in the whole world... But they only spy at night. During the day they are like all the other giraffes in the world, so the Day time Zookeeper's never understand why I manage to lose them! It's because the Day Zookeepers don't see what happens when night falls. They don't see how the Spying Giraffes transform and nearly become invisible, disappearing as completely as food from a hungry hippo's plate and they escape from the zoo to spy on people!

At least, that's what I think they do beyond the zoo's walls. I imagine them hiding in car parks, bowling alleys and school playgrounds. Spying on people who can't see them because of their power of invisibility.

Listen! Can you hear that? There is a faint murmuring coming from deep within the giraffe's forest glade. Right at the back, where night is at its darkest, (ssshh) I can hear the hush of softly spoken whispers, like they're sharing a secret.

Standing next to a tall skinny tree with my binoculars from the Night Zookeeper kit, I scan the shifting shadows hoping to spot some Spying Giraffes so that I can ask them about the alarms that sound at night. When all of a sudden, the tall skinny tree sways backwards and forwards (even though it isn't a windy night), and then speaks to me!

“Hello Night Zookeeper” says the tree. Now, there are many strange things in the Night Zoo, but I must admit I have never met a talking tree before. I look up and discover that it isn't a tree at all, it is a Spying Giraffe!

"I'm Sam," says Sam the Spying Giraffe. Sam is so tall that he does actually look quite a lot like a tree. However he speaks in a very excitable and friendly voice so I smile back up at him.



"Good to meet you Sam." I say, then remembering my question, I ask him: "Can you tell me why the alarm keeps sounding?" Sam looks down at me and his smile disappears.

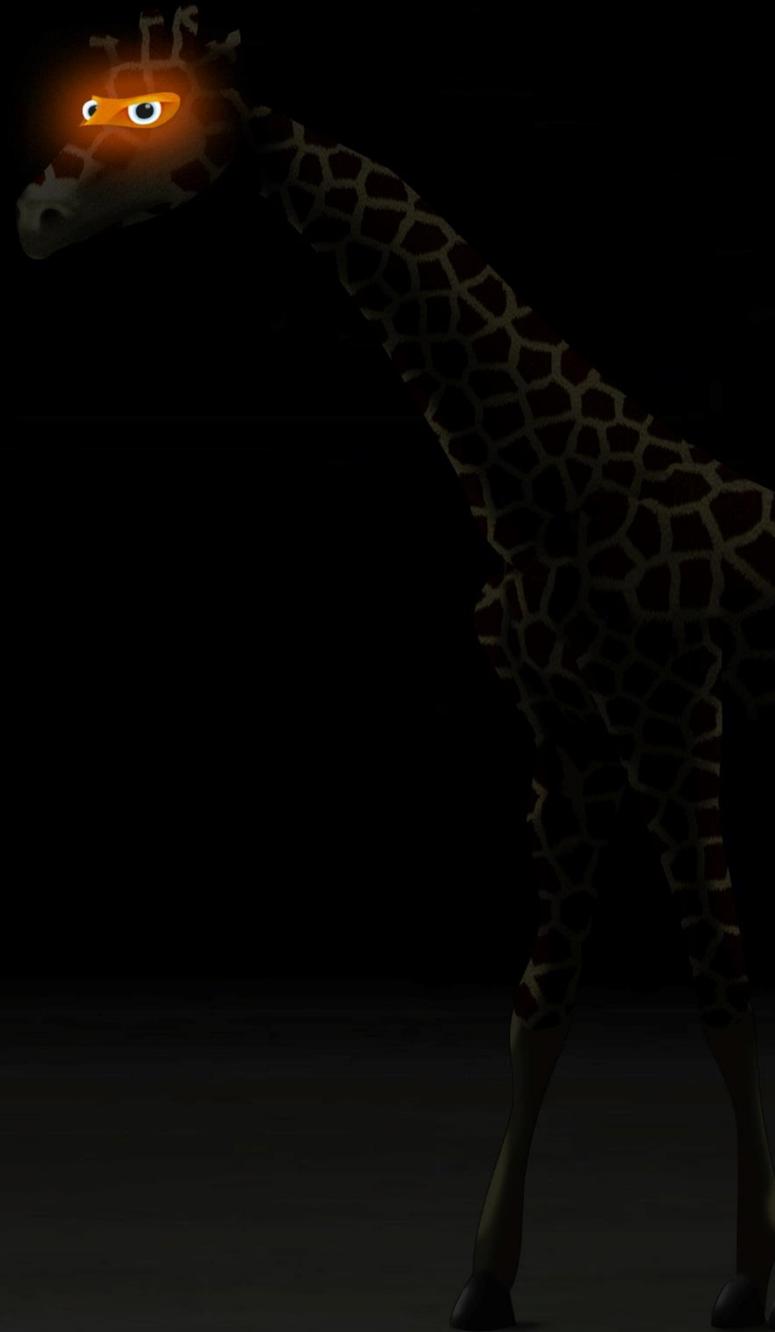
"I don't know." He says with an expression on his face that I normally equate with doing math. "Do you?"

"Why would I ask if I knew?" I reply laughing, but Sam isn't bothered.

"I thought you knew everything about the Night Zoo?" He says innocently.

"I do," I say feeling defensive. "I just haven't heard that alarm before."

"Does he know?" Sam says looking at you. He canters up to you and licks your face with his big black tongue. Apparently this is a friendly greeting because he is now running around you chasing away the hovering waterflies that inhabit the many forests and woodlands of the Night Zoo. I think he likes you. Sam finally gives up on catching the waterflies and returns to our side.



"I'm just a Spying Giraffe in training I'm afraid." He says. "We will have to ask the Time Travelling Elephant!"

"The Time Travelling Elephant?!" I exclaim, amazed by such a magical sounding creature. "Where can I find him?"

"The Time Travelling Elephant is actually a female, and she lives in the very middle of the zoo, in a huge temple so I'm sure you will find her." says Sam indicating the direction I need to walk with his long neck. "If you get lost, I wouldn't worry, she is sure to find you at some point in time."

"Thanks!" I say, but Sam the Spying Giraffe has mysteriously vanished. Spying Giraffes are known to do that I'm afraid. I pick up my pencil and draw a quick picture of Sam so that I will be able to spot him better in the future. (It might be a good idea for you to do that too).



Fact File: Spying Giraffes

Lives: They travel around the Night Zoo and hide in the shadows.

Likes: They enjoy hiding from the Night Zookeeper and reading detective stories. They especially enjoy playing hide and seek.

Dislikes: Spying Giraffes do not like climbing stairs. They have a strong distrust of hawks and do not enjoy the harsh cold of winter.

Special because: Spying Giraffes are special because they are the best hidiers in the whole world and can be heard whispering from the shadows.



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