

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

Jose was frustrated. The early June sun was beating down on the pavement, baking the amusement park and its visitors in a sweltering steam bath.

Something is wrong. I can feel it, he thought angrily to himself. *But I can't figure out what.*

He stood in front of the Country Bear Jamboree in Disney World's Magic Kingdom. He knew vaguely that he looked like a sentry for Frontierland, with arms crossed over his muscular chest and feet planted apart. However, he didn't look like the typical visitor to the many Orlando, Florida theme parks, but Jose knew that was not the reason he was very much an object of attraction.

It was the annual Gay Day at the Disney World Resorts. The homosexual population of the world and their supporters descended in throngs upon the parks the first weekend of every June, all sporting red shirts, a subtle signal that the wearer was gay or gay friendly. In contrast, Jose, who was of African and Puerto Rican descent, sported a bright white T-shirt that did nothing to hide his chiseled physique. A huge pink triangle emblazoned with the words 'Straight but not narrow' spread across the chest.

As he ignored the appreciative and sometimes lustful glances, Jose tried to filter out the psychic noise of so many minds invading his telepathy and isolate the fleeting thought that alerted him. But now his mental scans revealed nothing.

"Jose!"

At the sound of his name, Jose turned to see two thirty-something (forty-something?) men approaching. One was a tall slender black man, but several inches shorter than Jose. His partner, the one who had called out, was an even shorter white man.

"DJ, I knew you two would show up. Hey, Paul." He greeted his friends warmly with handshakes and hugs.

"Was it that uncanny ability of yours to predict the future?" DJ teased.

"No, it was more like the half dozen emails you sent me, telling me you would be here."

"Well, we can't just leave these things to chance," Paul winked.

"Is it chance that I'm here? The Disney Corporation received a possible terrorist threat, but there wasn't enough information to determine if it was credible." Jose scrutinized their faces as if he were suspecting them. Paul and DJ looked back at him passively, unperturbed. *Resourceful, yes, but terrorists? No.* "They brought me in to be on the safe side, since I can be discreet. I just wish I could be discreet, and not so obvious," he moaned.

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

“A gorgeous, six-foot four-inch mustachioed black man wearing a white T-shirt in a sea of red? You couldn't be more obvious if you were naked, Jose.” DJ crossed his arms, speaking as if the fact was apparent.

Jose held up a finger. “Don't even go there,” he warned. DJ remained unruffled. “How can I get everyone to stop hitting on me?”

“Leave.” Paul replied simply.

“Or change genders,” DJ added, just as matter-of-factly.

“In other words, I'm screwed,” Jose snarled. “I said, ‘Don't go there!’” Again, pointing at DJ, who held up his hands in surrender with mock annoyance. Jose suddenly spun around.

I felt it again, he thought, alarmed. I know something is very wrong now.

He started walking away, taking steps with care as he searched again for the source of the thought.

DJ and Paul looked at each other as Jose wandered off without a word.

“How rude!” DJ pretended to be offended, but knowing better. “Just taking off like that without...Wow! Take a look at those good-looking guys over there, Paul!”

“Come on! Let's go talk to them,” Paul responded, forgetting the incident with Jose.

Jose found himself lured toward the Big Thunder Mountain roller coaster ride. With so many thoughts and feelings from the crowd, the noise in his mind was so loud; it was louder than the ambient din of the hordes of people milling about in the park. He knew he was violating a major rule of the psionics that forbade them from reading others' thoughts without permission, but the coldness of the fleeting thought he had felt precluded any rule. The potential seriousness of the situation dictated it.

Besides I'm not probing deeply into anyone's psyche, he said inwardly. Just shallow scans to locate the one with such horrid thoughts. There it is again, only stronger! Jose began to hone in on the strong emotion, using his telepathy to guide him.

Crowds were standing in long lines waiting for the ride, seemingly oblivious of the hot sunshine. Others carried a FastPass card, which they had procured earlier in the day and now allowed them to jump to the head of the queue. They were rushing into wide entry of the ride's structure as if being pulled in by a huge vacuum cleaner.

Walking with a slightly faster gait, Jose followed the FastPass holders as if in a trance. The piercing thought became more pronounced, eclipsing all others. He quickened his pace. He reached the attendant retrieving the FastPasses, but with a slight telepathic

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

nudge, the attendant did not notice the tall man breezing past him. The other riders in line also did not heed him, nor scold him for cutting in line.

He entered the boarding area, still searching for his quarry. Two young men in red tank tops and khaki shorts were climbing into a roller coaster car. One of the men carried a small backpack.

It's here, he thought with little feeling. *One of those two guys.*

Keeping the telepathic pressure, Jose stepped in front of the line of people waiting to board and entered the car right behind the two men. A few seconds later, the roller coaster train moved slowly away from its gate. As soon as it cleared the structure, Jose dropped his telepathic dominance and focused on the pair in front of him.

One of them had been thinking powerful emotional thoughts, but Jose couldn't tell which one or if he was still thinking them. Once the ride began to move, all the passengers experienced a huge surge of excitement and the emotions effectively blocked his telepathy.

The roller coaster began its first slow climb. Jose knitted his brows together in concentration, trying to filter out the exhilaration around him and subduing his own excitement. It was not easy. As soon as he managed to soften the mental cacophony in his brain, the roller coaster reached the top of the climb and began its wild ride. Screams and shrieks of delight pierced the air and his eardrums, sending another burst of psychic static into his mind.

This is useless, he groaned as he closed his mind to all thoughts around him, but leaving a very small opening in his psionic power. He couldn't shut it off completely, since he knew it was required. His telepathy was what brought him to this ride in the first place, and it would help him decipher this mystery.

He held tight as the roller coaster dipped, turned and tossed its human cargo about. The riders were nearly ecstatic with thrills and excitement, but Jose felt nothing. He spread his long legs wide, bracing himself with his feet against the movement of the ride.

Suddenly, he felt a sharp sensation of pain as a feeling of terror pierced his consciousness easily, even through his mental barriers. One of the men in front of him screamed in hysteria.

In an instant, Jose realized that the panic the man felt wasn't because of the ride. The roller coaster made a sharp turn and the frightened man, sitting on the outside, flew out of the car. He shrieked terrified in alarm.

With lightning reflexes, Jose reached out with a long arm and caught the man in a tight telekinetic grip. With extreme psionic effort, Jose yanked him back into the car before

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

his forward momentum flung him into the rock façade of Big Thunder Mountain. He guided the man into his arms, holding him closely.

Stop the ride! Jose ordered the roller coaster operator, somewhere ahead at the controls. His telepathic command would not be mistaken or ignored. The roller coaster ground to an abrupt halt.

Several minutes later, emergency and security personnel had descended upon the scene. The rest of the passengers had been enjoying the ride thoroughly and were unaware of the near tragedy. Some were voicing their annoyance at the interruption until Jose silenced them with a look. Psionic or not, he was intimidating physically.

The man whom Jose had saved was lying on the ground as EMT's examined him for injuries. He was shaking uncontrollably from the shock. His partner stood close by, hugging his backpack to his chest.

The man on the ground began to babble, "Why? Why?"

"We don't know why the bar came loose, sir." A female EMT tried to soothe him. "Just try to stay calm."

Jose heard the man's plaintive cry, but knew he meant something else entirely. He turned to the man's partner.

"He wants to know why you forced the restraining bar up so he would be thrown from the ride. You wanted him badly hurt, or worse, killed." Jose's tone revealed that he wasn't asking a question. It was the partner's chilling thoughts of harm that Jose's telepathy had sensed. "Why?"

The partner, caught off-guard, began to stutter and clamored for an answer. While he tried to respond, he reached into his backpack as if to retrieve an item.

Something is still very wrong, Jose thought with sudden fear. I can feel it even stronger now!

The partner's thoughts were not of guilt, remorse or even shame. It felt to Jose almost like...smugness? Victory?

In a flash of realization, Jose immediately commanded, *FREEZE!* At the psionic order, the man instantly became as still as a statue.

"Chief Rainier!" Jose called over his shoulder. An older but fit officer with graying hair and patches identifying him as part of Disney's security force ran over.

"What is it, Jose?" The chief became alert when the psionic officer sounded urgent.

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

Jose merely pointed to the young man's hand inside the backpack. Chief Rainier cautiously opened the bag wider.

"Holy shit!" He recoiled. "He's got a trigger mechanism!"

"Are there explosives in the backpack?" Jose was articulate to keep the rising stress down.

"No, the bag is nearly empty." The chief took a second to gather his wits.

"I could find out where he's hidden the bomb, but that requires a mind probe, for which I need his permission or..." Jose began.

"I know the rules." Rainier held up a hand as he interrupted. "As chief of security here at the Magic Kingdom, I authorize you to do whatever is necessary to find that bomb! Or bombs."

Mimicking the would-be bomber's earlier smugness, Jose turned back to him. Although the man could not move, fear showed clearly in his eyes, as Jose pressed his fingers to the man's face. Physical contact enhanced psionic powers such as telepathy. It also ensured a better reception for the psionic officer.

Jose probed deep into the man's psyche, pushing through his fears, the emotional hurdles he had to overcome to attempt the murder of his partner, to the base hatred and loathing of people and the uncaring attitude toward human life to plant a bomb. Deep within the psyche where anger, disgust and abhorrence, both for others and for self, lurked the answer Jose sought.

"Stop the trains!" Jose suddenly yelled. *Stop the trains!*

Chief Rainier shouted the order into a microphone at his shoulder, but Jose's telepathic command to the trains' conductors ensured the trains had halted where they were. Passengers noticed they had stopped but carried on loud and animated conversations, not worried about the delay. It wasn't until they were instructed to disembark because the trains would not resume service for the remainder of the day that they began to grumble.

**

Several long hours later, Jose, Chief Rainier and his security force had disarmed the detonator, and the bomb. Thankfully, there had only been one, planted under a short railroad bridge that spanned a shallow stretch of water on the park's perimeter, opposite Frontierland. The terrorist had been arrested and removed from the park. His partner, who almost lost his life, left unhurt, but in stunned disbelief.

Inside the Magic Kingdom's security office, the officers finally relaxed.

It's a Deadly World After All

by Alan Scott

“His attempt at murder was to draw attention to this side of the park so no one would be looking or available when he blew the bridge,” Jose explained, in somewhat disbelief as well. “The death toll from the bomb would probably have been low due to the slow speed of the train, the shortness of the bridge and the shallow water, but if all the emergency personnel were called away elsewhere, the response would be slow, also. There may have been casualties.”

“We found fanatical Christian conservative letters near the bridge, denouncing homosexuality, but he confessed to writing them,” Chief Rainier replied. “Why was he trying to kill other gay men and women?”

“It was propaganda to garner sympathy for the gay rights’ movement by making martyrs out of the people attending Gay Day this weekend,” Jose continued. “As you know, Disney has been under fire for allowing this event to continue, as conservative groups fight against gay rights, prolonging the process. But even they would not stoop to a level as low as this. This guy thought that a horrific incident might turn popular opinion their way and hurry things up a bit.”

The chief could not believe his ears. He shook his head. “Disney is managing to keep a lot of this quiet, so nobody suspects that a domestic terrorist attack nearly took place. They only know that someone was almost killed on a ride, and that in itself will be enough to keep Disney’s spin doctors busy for a while,” he said, then added with confidence. “But we will weather this storm.”