

PETER NUREYEV AND THE ANGEL OF BRAHMA (PART ONE)

SOUND: DOOR OPENING, BELL, RAIN & MUSIC.

CONCIERGE:

Ah, good evening, traveler. Welcome to the Penumbra. A Martian tomb, miles beneath the planet's surface. Captured by Miasma and forced into strange and sinister experiments, things are looking grim... for Peter Nureyev.

Peter Nureyev: master thief, the man without a name, has never stayed imprisoned for long. But he has Detective Steel to consider now, the man Miasma's really after, whose mind is strained a little more with every test, with every turn of Miasma's dial.

Nureyev could escape on his own, if only he'd leave the detective behind, but will he? To answer that, you'll have to ask yourself: who is Peter Nureyev?

SOUND: KNOCKING, DOOR OPENING. PAINED YELL.

What luck! It sounds like he's in. Come, traveler, come with me into room J-17.

SOUND: DOOR CREAKING.

Peter Nureyev and the Angel of Brahma.

SOUND: RAIN & MUSIC FADE.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS, AMBIENT HUM.

MIASMA:

(SIGHS)

Again.

JUNO:

Again?! I got nothing left in me, lady, my skull feels like it's gonna crack in two.

MIASMA:

Then I would recommend you let it crack, Juno Steel. You wouldn't want your thief to suffer because you weren't trying hard enough, would you?

NUREYEV:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

Take your rest, Juno. I'll be fine.

MIASMA:

Hmm...

SOUND: ELECTRIC WHIRRING.

NUREYEV:

(YELLS)

MIASMA:

(OVER NUREYEV)

He certainly sounds fine.

JUNO:

Stop it!

MIASMA:

Oh no, take your rest, Juno Steel. By all means. I can listen to this all day.

MUSIC: START.

JUNO:

I - I'll do it again, all right? Just turn that thing off.

MIASMA:

(SIGHS)

If you insist.

NUREYEV:

(IN THE DISTANCE, PANTING)

Well, that was... exhilarating.

MIASMA:

(OVER INTERCOM)

Now. Thief, turn over a card.

(TO JUNO)

Juno Steel, tell me what it says.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

We'd been playing this game for days.

JUNO:

(STRAINED)

Green diamond.

MIASMA:

Very good.

(OVER INTERCOM)

Next.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

At least, I thought it had been days. I couldn't tell how much time had passed. Not much sunlight pokes through down here, a mile beneath the red desert, buried alive in an Ancient Martian tomb.

JUNO:

Red square?

MIASMA:

Correct.

(OVER INTERCOM)

Next.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

When Miasma grabbed us after we'd robbed the Utgard Express, when she duped us into handing her that ancient superweapon, I thought that'd be the end of it. Get dragged to a secret base, spend a couple hours in a dark room getting beaten around by some gorilla with a lot of

questions, and then, we'd be done. I didn't know whether we'd leave in a blaze of glory, or a body bag, but - that seemed like something we could negotiate when it came up. But this.

Days of this... stupid experiment. Over and over again. Days of working us too long and waking us too quick... This was a lot less fun than I had imagined. Over and over again, one of her masked lackeys would strap me down in one room, Nureyev in another, and she'd have him flip cards. So. Many. God damn cards.

MUSIC: STOP.

MIASMA:

(OVER INTERCOM)
Thief. Draw two.

(TO JUNO)
Juno Steel?

JUNO:

A red triangle, and...
(GASPS)
a blue... star.

MIASMA:

Which star?

JUNO:

How the hell am I supposed to know-

SOUND: WHIRRING.

NUREYEV:

(YELLS)

MIASMA:

Which. Star, Juno Steel.

JUNO:

(STAMMERING)

I-I-I don't know, alright, I didn't think it was gonna be an exam, or whatever.

MIASMA:

You are missing the point. You may not know, but he does.

JUNO:

Fine, I'm trying, I'm... It's Vega! It's Vega, alright, just cut it out.

SOUND: WHIRRING & YELLING STOP.

Look, if you wanted me to read his mind for the star you should've just asked-

MIASMA:

(CUTTING HIM OFF)

This isn't working. If you won't cooperate, Juno Steel, I'm afraid I'm going to have to get... unpleasant. Assistant! Prepare him for stage two.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

JUNO:

Are all your assistants this talkative?

MIASMA:

I have them silenced.

SOUND: WRENCH CLICKING.

I prefer people that way.

JUNO:

Well that's... nope, I can't even think of a joke for that one. That's pretty messed up, Miasma.

MIASMA:

Is it? Or is it worse that the price at which they'll sell their voices away is much lower than you'd think.

JUNO:

Well they can both be messed up, Miasma, nutjobs usually travel in packs.

MIASMA:

I invented my silencing process. I pay my assistants for their voices. I have worked tirelessly to get what I want and so, I get it. Always.

You're about to learn that firsthand. You've taken what's rightfully mine, Juno Steel. And nobody takes what belongs to me. Soon I will have what I want. Then, you will die.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

Listen. I don't say this lightly, but - there was something about Miasma that made me want to puke.

She just didn't seem... right. She looked too hard at things, but with too little interest. Sometimes I'd turn away for a second, and when I looked back, I could swear something about the way she looked had changed. But I couldn't pin down what. Staring at her too long felt like getting carsick.

MIASMA:

Brace yourself, Juno Steel. This will only hurt a lot.

JUNO:

What...

SOUND: DRILL.

_____ Ah- Ahhh!

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

It felt like the diodes the assistant had put on my head were digging holes in my skull, picking through bone and scooping out the brain inside.

SOUND: DRILL STOPS.

JUNO:

(PANTING)

You should market that. Could make a killing in the alarm clock business.

SOUND: QUICK TYPING.

Sooooo, what are you up to on that computer? Screen that big, you gotta be able to play a hell of a lot of solitaire.

MIASMA:

(TO ASSISTANT)

You. Go monitor the thief.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS

(TO JUNO)

You know what I'm after, Juno Steel. The Lassonianic Capsule. The ancient medicine held by Saffron Pharmaceuticals. The one you swallowed.

(SCOFFS)

Saffron understood the pill's general purpose, but none of the details. That's what happens when you send chemists to do the work of an anthropologist: you get details without context.

JUNO:

You call 'mind-reading super drug' a detail?

MIASMA:

They took a sample of the capsule's chemical composition, and their analysis of that sample was correct. But because they didn't bother to read the inscriptions where they found it, they missed the capsule's true calling.

SOUND: CREAKING.

Look here.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

She turned her screen, and I was enough of a moron to look. It was a big, swollen mass, red and purple like someone just filled a potato with blood until it was ready to burst. The thing's bulgy roots were twisting into the back of an eyeball.

I didn't need to ask whose eye it was.

MIASMA:

This is the Lassonianic Growth, Juno Steel. And it lives somewhere around... here.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

Her finger, dry as death, touched my right eyelid.

MIASMA:

Not so funny now, are you? You have no one to blame but yourself - you swallowed the capsule and now the very last growth has taken root in you. I cannot remove it without killing it.

JUNO:

Sounds like it's comfy where it is, get your own.

MIASMA:

That is precisely the plan. With this machine, I can replicate it. And implant one in myself.

Every time you activate the growth's abilities, my machine gathers more information on its biological composition. But I need much more information in order to duplicate it. And you've barely scratched the surface of what it can do.

Thus far you have only read the conscious mind: the thoughts that people show themselves. But - at the growth's fullest capacity, you should be able to dive beyond the conscious mind, into the subject's memories. Those are the readings I need.

(OVER INTERCOM)

Assistant! Give the thief the shot.

JUNO:

No!

NUREYEV:

(GASPS)

(IN THE DISTANCE)

Well, Miasma, I can see you couldn't afford to keep a nurse on staff. This one... couldn't inject a sedative... into the broad... side of a...

MIASMA:

There. Now, without his conscious mind in the way it should be easier for you to see what lurks beneath.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

I didn't want to see what was inside Peter Nureyev's mind. If a man like him chooses to hide in the shadows, it might be better to let him stay there.

MIASMA:

You're hesitating.

JUNO:

I'm not, I'm... warming up? Getting limber.

MIASMA:

But why are you hesitating, I wonder? You've worked with him several times now, you even know his name. Yet you don't know the first thing about him. And why not? A good detective looks into every lead, doesn't he?

JUNO:

(SHORT LAUGH)

MIASMA:

It's a shame you can't look into your own mind. I imagine you could use some tidying up in there. But enough of that. My patience grows thin.

Now, Juno Steel. Or else.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

I had no choice. I closed my eyes, and pushed.

SOUND: LOW DRONE, GRADUALLY LOUDER.

And pushed harder. My thoughts pressed up against his, and I felt something. Like a... handle. I closed my mind around it.

I opened the door.

SOUND: DRONE STOPS.

A strange room, coated in sticky red light. Two men: one older, broader, with big, yellow eyes like an owl's, and the other... young. A boy, really, lean and tall.

Nureyev. Twenty years ago, at least. The older man was holding something, something heavy, and glowing. Nureyev was holding something, too. A knife.

VOICE 1:

Here's something else I stand for, Peter. I won't draw a knife on my family. Do what you like, but I will not strike back.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

NUREYEV:

Don't walk away from me! I'll do it! I swear I will!

SOUND: FASTER FOOTSTEPS.

Haaah!

SOUND: STABBING SOUND, CRASHING.

VOICE 1:

Oh, Peter... Oh, my boy.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

The knife deep in his back, the owl-eyed man reached out and touched Nureyev's cheek. Tenderly. Lovingly.

Nureyev flinched away from that hand as if it were a hot poker. Nureyev stared at the dead man, a blood-slick knife in his hand, and in the strange red light of that strange red room, I could not tell where the knife ended and Peter Nureyev began.

SOUND: LOUD DRONE.

JUNO:

(SCREAMING)

SOUND: SLAP.

MIASMA:

What are you doing! You had it, you were precisely.

SOUND: SLAP.

Where.

SOUND: SLAP.

I wanted!

SOUND: SLAP.

Again.

JUNO:

(PANTING)

No. No, I can't go in there again.

MIASMA:

Oh, can't you?

(OVER INTERCOM)

Assistant! Get a knife and bring me one of the thief's thumbs.

JUNO:

No! No, stop it.

MIASMA:

Then do it. Now.

JUNO:

(PAUSES)

Alright. Fine. Fine.

MIASMA:

Good.

(OVER INTERCOM)

Belay that order, assistant, but keep the knife ready.

(TO JUNO)

Now, Juno Steel, again.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

I had no choice. So I reached.

SOUND: LOW DRONE.

MIASMA:

(FADING)

That's it. You're nearly there.

SOUND: DRONE STOPS.

SOUND: BIRDSONG.

VOICE 2:

(A BIT OF A STUTTER)

... a delightful surprise. Dignitaries from Akhna. I-It is an honor to speak with you, gentlemen, I-I wish I had been better prepared.

VOICE 1:

Well, we hope we haven't inconvenienced you too much, Madam Rossignol. In times of war, it's best to keep things zipped up, hush-hush, secure as lunch in your belly. And speaking of which, shall we exchange documentation?

VOICE 2 (ROSSIGNOL):

I hope our security measures don't insult you; for obvious reasons, New Kinshasa is a high-security location here on Brahma, and I-

VOICE 1:

(CUTTING HER OFF)

No insult, no insult. Hand her the papers, Peter.

NUREYEV:

With pleasure.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Nureyev and the man I'd watched him kill were sitting side by side in shining white suits, and grins.

They were sitting in an upscale office, high over a strange city with spinning fountains and aquamarine parks and pastel buildings as far as the eye could see. In the distance where there should have been rolling fields, or oceans, or desert, there were clouds. An endless, swollen plane of clouds.

ROSSIGNOL:

Well, these all appear to be in order. Mag Ransom and... Peter Ransom.

(LAUGHS)

Father and son. I-I didn't know they made dignitaries in pairs.

VOICE 1 (MAG):

Oh, we're the first of our kind.

NUREYEV:

First and second, respectively.

MAG:

We're trying to change the way we look at how the Outer Rim is run. The human race is one big family, after all. Why not act like it?

NUREYEV:

Every family has its quarrels, whether you're hurling insults across a dinner table, or nuclear warheads across five nebulae.

MAG:

And we're hoping to solve these galactic quarrels as a family would.

NUREYEV:

Through discipline.

ROSSIGNOL:

My, this is... uh... v-very touching.

MAG & NUREYEV:

(TOGETHER)

It is.

ROSSIGNOL:

Well, forgive my surprise, gentlemen. The-the Outer Rim government has n-not... supported our system here on Brahma in the past.

NUREYEV:

How fortunate that the past is behind us, then.

MAG:

And in the present we are very excited about this system of yours, the... what did you call it?

ROSSIGNOL:

The Guardian Angel System.

NUREYEV:

So... GAS for short?

MAG:

(LAUGHS)

ROSSIGNOL:

I-Is there something... wrong?

NUREYEV:

Of course not, of course not. Well, I have to say I think our research has convinced us, so if we could get right to business.

ROSSIGNOL:

Oh, I don't think I need to tell you gentlemen that the-the Guardian Angel System is the most incredible achievement in security in the Outer Rim.

MAG:

No, you don't. In fact, my son just said-

ROSSIGNOL:

As you know, Brahma is now very nearly on the front lines of our war. People act like the world is ending, and in times like these, well -

MAG:

(CUTTING HER OFF)

People forget how to behave.

NUREYEV:

For shame.

ROSSIGNOL:

P-precisely! Everything, from-from petty crime, to violent revolt... You wouldn't believe what people try to get away with here. What-whatever happened to patriotism? Loyalty?

NUREYEV:

After all, Brahma belongs to you. They're just living on it.

ROSSIGNOL:

Exactly. And that's just where the Guardian Angel System came from.

As New Kinshasa flies over Brahma, our constables are hard at work, taking reports, manning security cameras, and when-when the time comes, POW! High-impact but incredibly precise laser fire.

Has a protest opened up? We can fire one hundred bolts in less than a second! Instant incapacitation. A-and why stop there? We can stun pickpocketers, looters-

MAG:

(CUTTING HER OFF)

Litterers.

NUREYEV:

Jaywalkers!

ROSSIGNOL:

Anybody! It's entirely up to us, gentlemen. We can create whatever planet we like. W-whatever people we like, because we have New Kinshasa, and we have the Guardian Angel System.

MAG:

So you have GAS, you mean.

SOUND: THUMP.

Ow...

ROSSIGNOL:

I'm afraid I-I don't understand?

MAG:

Based on what you've said, Madame Rossignol, I assume the Guardian Angel System is in use even now? Because if Akhna

is going to buy into this technology, we're going to have to see it in use.

ROSSIGNOL:

You want to see it? W- I suppose I... I could set up an appointment for you to talk to the head of security...

NUREYEV:

I'm afraid if it's going to happen, it will have to be now. We've many other planets to see.

ROSSIGNOL:

It's entirely against code...

MAG:

Oh, what's the harm? You've already run our paperwork through the system. You know we're here on official business. And calls back to Akhna take so long.

NUREYEV:

But I suppose if it can't be done, we could just leave.

ROSSIGNOL:

No, no! Let's not be hasty, gentlemen. An official visit, I-I can't grant, but I might be able to sneak you in for a... a quick peek at the control room.

MAG:

Sneaking, eh? That sounds like fun.

ROSSIGNOL:

W-well, if you weren't officials from Akhna, I certainly wouldn't be-

MAG:

I used to sneak about a lot when I was younger. Out of the school dormitories and into - well, I won't get into that in front of my boy.

NUREYEV:

Thank you, father.

MAG:

But there's one rule I always hold to. The smaller your group, the better your chances. Pete, you'll stay here.

NUREYEV:

But- I-

MAG:

No buts! I'll bring back a full report and we'll discuss the pros and cons over dinner. Now, go check that the coast is clear, Madame Rossignol. I'll be out once I gather my papers.

ROSSIGNOL:

O-of course, Mister Ransom.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS; DOOR OPENING & CLOSING.

MAG:

Well, she's a treat, isn't she? So far you could say that this is a real-

NUREYEV:

(OVER HIM)

Stop.

MAG:

-gas!

MAG & NUREYEV:

(LAUGHING)

MUSIC: START.

MAG:

But enough joking around, Pete, you remember the plan.

NUREYEV:

The password changes every day, Rossignol must have it somewhere in her office.

MAG:

And at the first sign of trouble?

NUREYEV:

I disappear.

ROSSIGNOL:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

Mister Ransom?

MAG:

Coming! I'd offer you luck boy, but you don't need it.
We're on our way to great things. I'm very proud of you.

NUREYEV:

Yes, yes, I'm proud of me too. Now go, Mag.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS, DOOR OPENING & CLOSING.

Alright, then. The password.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

He went through the files on the desk first. Nothing.
Scanned the computer and there was nothing there, either.
Minutes had passed. Mag and Rossignol would be back any second.

NUREYEV:

Remember what Mag told you. Clear your mind, clear your mind. Put yourself in her head.

She must receive the day's passwords first thing in the morning or else she couldn't get anywhere. She comes in, she asks her secretary for some coffee...

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

She sits down to work. No, not to work, no coffee stains on the desk, she sits down... by the window. She looks outside, she lets in the breeze...

SOUND: WINDOW OPENING.

Musicians play in the square below, and it's... beautiful. The people mill about, go through their daily lives, she there, he there... That's his favorite cafe, there's the grocer she goes to every day. They all listen to the music, and New Kinshasa is home.

MAG:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

It's a shame about the control room, but you've nothing to worry about, Madame Rossignol. I'm quite impressed with what we've seen.

NUREYEV:

Dammit, focus, Peter, focus!

ROSSIGNOL:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

With what you've seen? But-but you've hardly seen anything more than the hall!

MAG:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

And what a hall it is!

NUREYEV:

(RUSHED)

She sits here, sips her coffee, looks at the password and her other mail... mail!

ROSSIGNOL:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

Mister Ransom, I would like to enter my office now!

MAG:

(IN THE DISTANCE)

Well, if you insist-

SOUND: DOOR OPENING.

Ah! Pete! Right where we left you, I see.

NUREYEV:

Of course. I hope you don't mind, Madame Rossignol, but I opened your window to let in the breeze. The square down there is lovely.

ROSSIGNOL:

New Kinshasa is quite a city.

MAG:

And we are delighted to learn that for ourselves. But I am afraid - for now - we must be on our way. Previous engagements.

ROSSIGNOL:

Oh- Oh, of course. It was a pleasure to meet you both...

NUREYEV:

You as well, Madame Rossignol.

SOUND: DOOR OPENING & CLOSING.

MAG:

(WHISPERING)

So, did you find the password?

NUREYEV:

I have it right here.

MAG:

Aha! That's it. Excellent, excellent. Now, the dummy paperwork was perfection, by the way. Nobody even batted an eye.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

They stepped into an elevator and looked through the crystal walls down to the square below. Something about

that place pulled on Nureyev's heartstrings; the music, the smells, the people going about their lives. It all felt like home.

SOUND: ELEVATOR WHIRRING.

NUREYEV:

Was... my father really from here, Mag?

MAG:

Of course. And don't forget, Pete. This is just as much for him, as it is for Brahma.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Looking out at the candy colored roofs, Nureyev had to wonder which one he and his father had lived in all those years ago. He tried to remember, but he was so young then.

SOUND: ELEVATOR SLOWING TO A STOP.

MAG:

I'll never forget the day I met him. I nearly punched him out, first thing. He dressed like a constable to make it down to the surface incognito.

(LAUGHS)

Brave man, your dad. Great man. But you've heard all this a thousand times, no need to wallow.

NUREYEV:

Could you... tell it again, Mag? I think I need to hear it again.

MUSIC: SOFT GUITAR MUSIC STARTS; BIRDS CHIRPING.

MAG:

Of course, Pete. A friend of mine sent your dad to me. He'd been asking around for a thief, he said. Someone quick enough, sly enough, to avoid getting caught by this city's damned lasers.

He'd brought only two things with him. The first was a set of plans - the plans to the Guardian Angel System. He'd risked his life to get them. He couldn't stand what this city does to the people down below.

And the second thing he brought? Was you. He said he'd hidden you somewhere safe. Didn't tell me where, of course, I'd only just met him. But the second he stepped outside my hideout, on the way back to you-

SOUND: CLOCK TOWER TOLLS FOUR TIMES.

Killed. Where he stood. A tragedy. A very great tragedy. It was years before I saw you again, and I knew who you were in an instant. You look just like him, Pete. More every day.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

A father who looked just like him. If he really tried, Nureyev could remember a long, lean man who was warm, who had a voice as soft as that guitar in the square. And then, all he remembered was the streets. The cold, and the hunger, and the lasers of the law cracking like lightning from the floating city above. The years of barely surviving, remembering only one thing: his name.

And then, Mag. And a purpose, for the first time.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

MAG:

Remember that, Pete. Remember what your father died for. There are people down there on Brahma who say we can sort all this out peacefully if we're just patient, but it's been too long already! They delayed me from carrying out this plan for years. And in the meantime, too many good people like your dad, gone.

NUREYEV:

But not forgotten. I'll make sure they never forget his name. Or mine. By this time tomorrow, they'll know. They'll all know the name Peter Nureyev.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

The way that Mag looked at Nureyev made me feel a little twinge in my gut. Love and pride, and... a little awe? Like he couldn't believe he'd had a hand in making this human being. Like he was sure that the galaxy would be fine, so long as it had people like Peter Nureyev in it.

...So why? This teenage revolutionary, this kid who was willing to risk his life to make Brahma a better place... Why would he kill a man who loved him that much? And how did he get from there to the man he was today? The master thief who'd broken and entered my life. I had to know. I reached further. Harder.

MIASMA:

(DISTANT)

Juno Steel. What do you think you're doing?!

MAG:

Now I think it's time we grab a bite to eat.

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

And then I felt... something.

MUSIC: ENDS.

SOUND: CRACKLING, ALARM BEEPING.

MIASMA:

(DISTANT)

My machine!

JUNO:

(DISTANT)

Augh!

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

Something... not so good.

SOUND: MORE INTENSE ALARM.

MAG:

[UNINTELLIGIBLE IN DISTANT BACKGROUND]

SOUND: BIRDS KEEP CHIRPING IN BACKGROUND; ALARM CONTINUING IN FOREGROUND.

MIASMA:

Juno Steel, if you break this machine, it's your head.

NUREYEV:

(FADING IN THE DISTANCE, TO MAG)

My father... Brahma...

JUNO:

AAAAHHHHH!

JUNO (NARRATOR) :

The pain was too much. I let go.

MIASMA:

Juno Steel, you will not pass out on my time! Wake up, you useless- I'll kill you!

SOUND: ALARMS FADE TO SILENCE.

Do you understand me, I'll kill you!

SOUND: BRIEF PAUSE.

CONCIERGE:

This, dear traveler, is what we at the Penumbra like to refer to as... an intermission. So please, take a moment, pour yourself a soothing libation, and once you've collected yourself, join us for part two of Peter Nureyev and the Angel of Brahma.

[Transcription credit to Rachel @bartholomewrose, with assistance from wadaonhar4, wordstomyears, Tara Olivero, and Dana Stahl.]