



A Million Stars and Shadows (Red Genesis #1)

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Category: YA&Teen

Description: What happened to the colonists and crew of Red Genesis?

When Evie finds a journal on a crashed spaceship in the dessert where she lives, she cant help but wonder, what happened to the people, the crew, and the owner of the journal? They were supposed to go to New Earth, but did they? What Evie knows from this journal was that things had gotten so bad on Old Earth that they had to flee and to escape.

What Evie knows is that she is the only one on this planet. Or is she?

*** A Million Stars and Shadows: Red Genesis is the prequel to Red Genesis, a YA dystopian horror science fiction fantasy for age14 and up!

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EVIE

Age 13

My lungs were burning, and my legs had turned to lead, weighing me down to a crawl.

I couldn't run further.

It didn't help that my space suit was too large and cumbersome to move around. It didn't help that my oxygen tank was almost as big as my suit, and sweat was pouring down my back, my chest, and my forehead.

The cooling system in my suit had turned off.

On New Earth, where the surface could be well over a hundred degrees in the daytime and freezing at night, having a temperature-controlling suit was necessary to survive on the surface.

"I wish I can take this off!" I shouted.

"Request denied," a female voice said from my helmet.

"This suit...it's weighing me down. I can't run," I yelled, barely able to catch my breath.

"For your safety, your request has been denied," the calm leveled voice said.

“I could kill you, Sally,” I said. “Let me out of this suit now!”

“If I did, you would die of suffocation. There is no oxygen on the surface. Don’t be an idiot.”

“Great,” I said. “My suit is talking back to me.”

“That’s the least of your worries, Evie,” Sally said. “In approximately five minutes, they will be all around us.”

“That’s why we need to move,” I said. “Now!”

“Get up and move, then,” Sally said, with a bit of an edge.

“I can’t when you’re weighing me down,” I said. “And your temperature-control system is off. I’m sweating to death here.”

“Analyzing the situation,” Sally said. “Hold on, it appears the connector valve between the air condenser and me has been dislocated.”

“That’s it,” I said, trying to reach the back of my oxygen tank with my gloved hand to grab the tube... only to find there was no tube. “It’s missing,” I said.

“Four minutes,” Sally said. “Before they reach us.”

“I need to reconnect the tube to the suit,” I said.

“No time for that,” Sally said. “Get up and run.”

“Run?” I said. “I weigh close to a ton.”

“Just temporarily,” Sally said. “Hold on.”

“Are you kidding me?” I asked. “I can’t get up. How can I even run?”

Instead of the authoritative female voice answering me back, a swoosh sounded in my ears. Then a rush of cool air swept through my suit, giving me an instant relief from the heat. “Oh that feels good,” I sighed.

“Good. Now get up and run!” Sally said. “You have three minutes.”

“But my legs...” I protested.

The air around my legs filled up to the point where the suit ballooned. I was now barely floating above ground. I took a step, and it was like I was bouncing off the ground, leaping distances forward. “Whoa!” I exclaimed.

“Wait until you see this,” Sally said. “Run and jump at the same time.”

I did as she said and saw that my speed accelerated double, even tripled. “Wow!” I ran and jumped forward.

“Keep going!” Sally said calmly. “You’re not out of the woods yet. They’re still coming after you.”

I kept running and jumping forward as fast as I could for as long as I could keep going until I reached a cliff.

“Can I rest now?” I asked Sally.

“Yes,” Sally said. “You are far away enough to elude them for a while, but not too far. You have a few seconds to catch your breath, Evie.”

“We must’ve traveled miles and miles,” I said.

“You can rest when you get to the ship,” Sally said. “Do not underestimate the speed and determination of them. They will be here before you know it.”

“The Monsters,” I said.

“You’ve been fortunate to not have encountered them when you were in the shelter with your mother,” Sally said. “But out here, they are everywhere.”

I shuddered, remembering everything I’ve known about them.

Ever since I can remember, THEY have always been here.

First, they appeared on Old Earth. They came out of nowhere suddenly. Unremarkable and unassuming.

No one knew about them until it was too late.

There wasn’t time for humankind to even give them a name...so they were just called, “The Monsters.”

I scoured all I could on them through the database of knowledge that was in the hidden wing of the Shelter. No one seemed to know what they were.

Thousands of accounts and filmed footage pulled up when I did a search for them. Taken from people’s own cameras and posted through social postings. People running frantically through the streets as though something terrifying was chasing them.

When the people stopped running, they stood still as though in a trance. The next

thing they all did was cover their ears, close their eyes, and sink to the ground, huddling and shaking with fear before letting out a blood-curdling scream right before they die, frozen with that face in utter terror.

It reminded me of the painting called “The Scream” by Evard Munch painted in 1893 which portrayed a man or a woman, you couldn’t tell which, holding their elongated wavy head with both hands, while screaming as though their very soul was dying.

The sky and air around the screaming victim seem to twist and turn into waves as the victim is engulfed in agonizing pain and fear. As though they had witnessed the gulping flames of hell and had died of fright.

Evard Munch’s own poem describing his painting reaffirmed my suspicion about this:

"I was walking down the road with two friends when the sun set; suddenly, the sky turned as red as blood. I stopped and leaned against the fence, feeling unspeakably tired. Tongues of fire and blood stretched over the bluish black fjord. My friends went on walking, while I lagged behind, shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous infinite scream of nature." - Edvard Munch

But this was something else more terrifying. The Monsters were attacking people with this wave of fear in masses. Like a horrible unspeakably evil storm, waves of people were engulfed in this terror, unable to escape, until it was too late.

The darkness covered the Earth. The only glimpse of light was the blood red of the flames underneath the dark clouds from explosions that came with unattended fires running rampant, caused by accidents.

“Mom?” I asked while helping her make dinner. “I can’t see the Monsters from any footage people took of them. It’s like where they are supposed to be, there is only a

wavy blurred image. Can they be seen?"

"Not with the human eye, Evie," Mom said. "That is why they are so formidable. We can't see them."

I shuddered. A cold chill went down my spine. "Then how are we supposed to fight them? How did Dad tried to fight them?"

"Ever since we were attacked at New Earth," Mom said. "I've been trying to figure that out. We knew a little bit about them before building the Shelter. We also knew a little about them before we tried to colonize New Earth. The Monsters travel like the wind, appearing suddenly out of nowhere, and feeding off people's fears, destroying them with their own worst fears."

"We fight them psychologically," I said.

"Yes," Mom said. "By being strong and grounded in something more powerful and stronger than they are."

"How did Dad tried to fight them?" I asked.

"He helped build the Shelter. We knew we had to block the Monsters from feeding into our fears."

"Mom, doesn't fear and other emotions, come from the brain?"

"Yes," Mom said. "And that's how we triggered the security measures for the Shelter."

She showed me how it worked and where it was around the Shelter.

“There is another thing you should know about The Monsters, which I realized your father knew, but the rest of us didn’t. They can evolve. Change shapes. When they solidify, we might be able to fight them then. So...”

We hit the martial arts gym Mom had set up. Instead of the usual mats and wrestling gear, now there were spears, archery, and other weapons. “What’s this for?” I asked.

“For when they solidify so we can take them down,” Mom said, gritting her teeth. “Because no matter how big they are; we will never go down without a fight.”

“Wake up! Break over,” Sally’s voice woke me up from my brief nap.

“I didn’t know I fell asleep,” I said. “I must’ve been really tired.”

“You should be,” Sally said. “You’ve been walking for days, searching for your mother. Searching for the ship she had set out to find. You barely stopped looking.”

“Until just now,” I said.

“You slept like a rock,” Sally said. “A common activity for humans to recharge their bodies. And a must for a 13-year-old girl like you to grow. The teen years for humans are the crucial growing years where getting enough sleep is important.”

“Well, Sally, I don’t have much time for sleep,” I said. “I don’t know what happened to my mother. She left a month ago looking to find supplies from one of the ships that brought us to New Earth. She was supposed to return to the shelter, but she didn’t come back.”

Thinking about my mother almost made me tear up. She was the only person I knew

on New Earth. My mother and I were the only survivors from Old Earth and now New Earth.

Now she was gone, and I was all alone.

I got up and looked all around me. How much further must I walk before I find something?

“Sally,” I said. “Can you scan around so we know where we are? How far is it back to the Shelter?”

“About five days’ worth of walking,” Sally said. “You have provisions on you for only one more day.”

I shook my head. “I can’t make it back to the Shelter now, can I?”

“There is an object in my perimeter,” Sally said, scanning ahead. “It is a larger mass, not indigenous to the area.”

“How far is it?” I asked.

Sally laughed. Actually laughed. “A hop, skip, and a jump away.”

“What?” I asked.

“Down there,” Sally said, raising my right hand to point down the cliff.

I gulped. “It’s a long way down there,” I said.

Swooshed. Again, there was that swoosh. Sally was inflating the suit until I was floating in the air like a human balloon. “We’ll float down.”

I didn't have a choice in the matter. With a push, Sally was controlling the suit, floating down off the cliff. I almost closed my eyes, but I didn't.

The float down into the bottom of the cliff was awe-inspiring. Different shades of reds, pinks, and oranges colored the beautiful, jagged cliff. My eyes went wide with wonder. I haven't seen such beauty on New Earth. In fact, I haven't been outside of the Shelter before to see what was on New Earth. The only times I've been outside the Shelter was when I had to fix the cameras outside the perimeters of the Shelter or the solar panels and other fixtures that help run our Shelter. My entire life had been within the Shelter, the only home I knew. Mom and I had decorated and made the Shelter into what Mom remembered of Old Earth. Although I had seen photos and films of beautiful places on Old Earth, like the Grand Canyon, this cliff I was floating down onto was similar, but with richer reds.

"There!" Sally said. "In front of you. There's the mass I told you about."

"I can't believe it," I cried out. "It's a ship. A ship, Sally!"

Right in front of me was a circular metallic structure which reminded me of the spaceships from Old Earth's 1950s alien films. "Could this be the ship Mom was looking for?" I asked.

"It could be," Sally said. "There's one way to find out, Evie." We floated straight down in front of the entrance.

"Let's hope Mom is here," I said.

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The spaceship was deceptively huge. Standing in front of the entrance, I could only stare straight up into the ship like a large skyscraper building in Old Earth's big cities. The ship was like a flying city.

Windows adorned the entire side of the ship, like shining jewels on a Christmas ornament. The metallic covering of the ship was flat, smooth, and reflective like a mirror. Walking up to the ship, I could see my own reflection.

An ingenious design, it camouflaged the ship, yet was able to reflect the intense heat that radiated from the surface of New Earth during the daytime. I couldn't tell what material the ship was made of, but despite traveling such a tremendous amount of distance, it held up remarkably. From where I stood, it looked like it was in excellent condition.

But inside? There was no telling what it was like inside without exploring.

Despite wearing a suit, now deflated, and a bubble helmet, I was lean, athletic, and of decent height for a 13-year-old. My long dark brown hair and hazel eyes gazed into the mirror to see the weariness on my face behind my helmet's front cover.

On Old Earth, they would consider me attractive because of the perfect symmetry I had between my facial features. My mother, herself, was considered attractive, and my father, according to my mother, was a "hottie". Although I had never met my father since he died before I was born, I always pictured him as a handsome movie star. That was how I pictured any good-looking person, since I spent most of my years in the Shelter, devouring all the films I could find from Old Earth.

“How do I get in?” I asked Sally. “Can you scan the ship to find some kind of entrance?”

“Already on it,” Sally said.

I looked around, trying to see if the disk-like structure had any seams that would be an opening.

“Found it,” Sally said. “Take 10 steps to your right.”

“Okay,” I said, following her direction. When I took the steps I faced the ship, wondering how I could get in.

“Now put your palms on the ship, both thumbs touching and fingers apart.”

I did as Sally said and waited.

“Are you sure this is right?” I asked.

Sally said, “Yes.”

“How do you know?” I asked.

“Because” Sally said. “Your mother Jana, the most brilliant engineer and scientist ever, built me. And... surprise surprise, Evie, she built this ship, too. My system has already recognized the ship’s system. I’m syncing in.”

“Wow, Mom built this ship?” I asked.

“Yes,” Sally the Suit said. “Your mother, Jana Gee, is classified as a genius. Her IQ level is much higher than the average human. She is particularly skilled at

technology, engineering, science, and problem solving. She built this ship, the Shelter, and me,” Sally said.

“And had me, to boot,” I said proudly. “Mom is a total badass.”

“Language,” Sally said.

“Sorry,” I said.

“Your mother is not only a badass,” Sally said. “She programmed me to guide you when she’s not available. That includes guiding you according to your age and experience level.”

“I’d say you are a ‘smart’ suit,” I said. “If I didn’t leave the Shelter and gone off looking for Mom, I wouldn’t have discovered you.”

“Like I said, Evie, your Mom is a genius. She thought of many things including me, if you decided to go outside of the Shelter.”

“I know. She told me to stay at the Shelter and don’t go looking for her until 5 years,” I said. “How can I follow her instructions and not look for her?”

“Like I said, your mother is a genius. Most geniuses have a method to their madness. Your mother must have a reason.”

“Okay. This is Mom’s ship so maybe we can find something here to find out what that reason is. Come on!” If this is Mom’s ship, I would be proud of her role in designing it. Much like the way she had designed my current suit, Sally, despite how Sally came across.

There was a click and a door appeared, opening wide. I waited for the stairs to

appear, but Sally just pushed me indoors.

Then the door shut close.

I turned to try to open the door behind me, but the seams of the door blended into the walls of the ship until the walls were seamless. The door simply disappeared.

“What now?” I asked Sally.

“I’m tapping into the system,” Sally said.

“Do you detect Mom anywhere on this ship?” I asked, looking around. I switched on the headlamp on my helmet and began walking forward.

On the first step, there was a whirling sound as though an engine had turned on. The path ahead of me lit up like a lighted flight path. I walked ahead following the lighted pathway until I came into a massive open space.

My mouth dropped open as I wondered at the beauty of the space. Like an atrium in the center of the ship, as large as a football stadium, in the center was a garden with lush tropical fruit trees, flowers, and colorful plants. Up above were bright lights shaped like diamonds.

“There’s so much food here. Orange trees, peaches, cherries, apricots, even pineapples,” I said. “And the flowers... they’re beautiful.”

I ran forward, eager to reach the fruits, the flowers, the plants, eager to touch and hold them. I was starved, haven’t eaten for days. I felt my stomach rumble in hunger, as it reminded me I haven’t eaten anything since I left my underground shelter home when I last left in search of Mom.

Mom! Could she be here? She left to go get supplies when we were running low in the underground shelter. She didn't return. But she had told me to stay put in the shelter and to wait for her. We had enough supplies there for a few more years but...

"I am searching for any movement on board," Sally said. "I am detecting movement on the top floor."

"Who is tending the garden?" I asked. "How is this going on without anyone in sight?"

As if to answer my question, as soon as the lights turned on over the garden, water showered the plants in a gentle mist. A robotic arm went out over each tree, checked the fruits, and if ripe, plucked it from the tree, depositing it into a basket on a track. When the basket was full, the basket rolled off like a small train into the wall that opened, then closed.

I followed it along until I stopped at the closing wall.

"Where would this go?" I asked Sally.

"Open the wall like you did coming onboard this ship," Sally said. "Do the sign."

I put my hand into the symbol and placed it on the wall and stood waiting.

The wall opened and I walked into an area like a clean processing center where the fruits were washed, cut up, freeze-dried, and packed into silver packs. They were then placed into storage containers and stacked into a corner.

"Wow, this is so efficient," I said. "But where are the people for all this food, Sally? Is there anyone here?"

“Top floor,” Sally said. “There is movement.”

“How do I get there?” I looked around, walking back out of the processing center and into the atrium. Then I saw a glass elevator that looked like something out of a high-rise hotel from Old Earth. I tried walking as fast as I could through the atrium, but the bulkiness of my suit made it difficult.

I finally had to sit down to get out of my suit. “I assume the air in here is breathable. Oxygen?”

“Yes, the air in here is breathable for you,” Sally said.

“Good,” I said, about to take off my helmet.

“Take me with you,” Sally said to me as I shed my suit. “You’ll need me to guide you around.”

“How?” I asked. It was the first time I had worn this suit, had even realized that one of the suits Mom left behind in the shelter had a built-in computer system named Sally in it.

“I pack neatly into a compact backpack,” Sally said. “Get out of the suit then press the button on the left chest pocket. It will automatically deflate the suit into a backpack. Wear the backpack, pull out the inner hoodie attached to the top of the backpack. Wear the hoodie as a cap. You can hear my voice through the sides of the cap. I will continue to work as your computing system. I will also monitor your body’s temperature and heartbeat.”

“Okay, Sally,” I said, glad Mom had thought of everything when she created Sally.

I followed her directions and was set. Then I headed to the elevators, which looked so

much like the ones in the films and videos I have watched hundreds of times in the shelter. I pressed the button to the top floor, 12 floor, and waited for the elevator door to open. The lights of the elevator lit up as it descended to the 2nd floor, where I stood. I marveled at the engineering that went into the design of a simple elevator. I could imagine how a well-lit elevator would work in an underground shelter like mine.

In a matter of minutes, I was on the 12th floor. The elevator door opened, and I walked out with Sally on my back.

“Turn left,” Sally said. “Then right into the Captain’s Quarters.”

I walked in the direction of Sally’s instruction and reached a door. “How do I open this?” I asked Sally. “No, don’t tell me. I think I know.”

I made the hand symbol and touched the wall like the other times I needed to open a door. It opened.

“Bravo,” Sally said. “You’ve learned quickly.”

“Yes,” I said. “There is a logic to how things work around here.”

“You know who designed and engineered this system,” Sally said.

“Mom,” I nodded. “I’m beginning to understand how this ship works. Just like the shelter she built.”

“Yes,” Sally said, “You think like her. You have her DNA. Hence, Evie, your handprint opens all the doors on this ship.”

“What?” I asked. “I thought I had to do a special symbol with my hands.”

“That’s just for my amusement,” Sally said. “I was joking with you. Just your handprint is enough.”

“Unbelievable,” I shook my head. “Sally, you are such a prankster.”

“Enough joking,” Sally said. “Pay attention. There was a movement in here. Keep alert. My system could not pick up what it was exactly, but if there is some movement, it could be anything, including something that can be hostile.”

Hostile? I had trained in martial arts with Mom ever since I could walk. I knew how to fight and protect myself. If there was anything I had to fight inside that room, I was as prepared as I could be. “Okay, let’s go,” I said, opening the door with my hand.

In a blink, a door appeared, and I slowly walked into the room.

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First, the splash of brilliant tiny lights nearly blinded me as I stepped into the room enveloped in a million stars and shadows.

“What room is this?” I asked out loud.

A woman’s voice answered me instead of Sally’s. “This is the Captain’s Room.” It was Mom’s voice.

I froze for a moment.

“Mom?” I called out. “Are you here? Where are you?”

“The Captain’s Room is where the captain and his team can map out and view the space ahead of him,” Mom’s voice continued. “Isn’t it lovely?”

The room looked like it was a part of space itself. The bluish-purple dotted with bright lights the colors of gold, silver, and cream.

“LED technology allowed us to transform every inch of this room into a projector screen,” Mom’s voice continued. “It is like a million stars and shadows.”

“That’s what I thought,” I said. “If I was to paint this, I picture it as a million stars and shadows.” I looked around. Where did her voice come from? In the room? “Mom? Mom? Where are you?”

I ran to where I last thought I heard Mom’s voice. But no one was there. I ran to another side of the room. Still no mother.

“Mom!” I yelled. “Why can I hear your voice, but you’re not here!” I was getting anxious. “Mom! I came all this way looking for you. I know you said I should stay put in the shelter, but I was really worried about you when you didn’t come back to the shelter. I’m sorry about that, Mom, but I thought you’d need my help. Mom...”

I thought I saw a shadow around the corner of my eyes.

“Evie,” a voice whispered close to my ear.

“Evie,” another voice whispered.

“Mom?” I called out. “Is that you?”

I turned around and lost my balance, falling onto a table or a desk. I couldn’t tell which one, but as my hand fell against the desk, touching it palm down, the room immediately changed.

Gone were the tiny stars and space scenery.

In front of me was a room lined with bookcases filled with logbooks, maps, and real books. My eyes widened with amazement at the bounty of books in front of me, but one book stood out from the shelf, pushed out further than the others.

I reached out for the book, which was covered in rich red leather. On the cover was a tiny golden lock, engraved with a letter “J”.

“What is this?” I asked.

“Open it,” Mom’s voice said.

“Mom?” I looked around. “Where are you? Why can’t I see you?”

“Your handprint will open it.”

“Of course,” I said. “My DNA is the same as Mom’s. It will open anything Mom can.” I placed my hand on the book, and it flew open, startling me.

“It’s Mom’s diary!” I shouted. “Mom, I found your diary. But where are you?”

“Evie!” Sally’s voice warned from my hat. “There is a movement in this space.”

“I couldn’t see anyone in this room, Sally. Where is the movement?”

“There to the left,” Sally said.

I looked and saw a bit of a shadow but nothing else.

“Was that mom’s voice all this time, Sally? Can you analyze it?”

“No, that was not your mother,” Sally said. “It was her likeness, recorded into the system, programmed to turn on when prompted by the right prompt.”

My heart dropped thinking that all this time, I’ve been talking to a computer when I thought I was talking to my mother. “Somehow, I did think it was a computerized voice. That it was a possibility.” I bit back tears.

“I’m overriding the system to tap into that voice,” Sally said. “It is a bit glitchy, not acting as it should be. An image was supposed to accompany the voice, but it is not working.”

“Evie,” Mom’s voice said. “You’ve made it.”

A shadow appeared near the bookcase where I had found the red journal. Mom’s

image. A holographic image, but there was so much depth to it, there were shadows cast as if the image had substance, like a real human being.

“That’s what the shadows and movement were,” I said.

As if to affirm my assumption, Mom’s hologram moved across the room from the bookcase to the desk.

“Movement detected,” Sally said. “Connected to the Voice of Jana Gee, Chief Engineer of the Red Genesis.”

“Mom,” I said.

“Your DNA from your handprint opened this message I left for you, Evie,” Mom’s hologram said. “I assume if you find this place, you would have left the Shelter looking for me. I wished you did not have to until I get back. If you are here, know that you are safe for now. I had prepared this ship to produce what you will need to sustain yourself for at least half a year to a year or two, depending on the fruit and vegetable processing center. I had fixed the center before leaving.”

“Leaving?” I asked. “Where did you go?”

“You may be asking where I went,” Mom said. “That is a long story, and I will let you read about the reason I took on this mission itself.”

“Mission?”

“The Red Genesis,” Mom said. “It’s bigger than just the ship...the one you are on is 1 or 3 Red Genesis ships.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“In the red journal you have,” Mom said. “It’s my journal where I wrote down everything I felt and went through from Day 1. Read it. It’ll explain why I did what I had to do.”

“Mom?” I asked. “What did you do?”

“Evie,” Mom’s image faded in and out, flickering like a lightbulb about to burst. “I trust you will know what to do. If you are here, you must have Sally with you. I programmed her to help you. She is a first generation Shelter Suit, which I had been working on so she may not be perfect...”

Mom’s voice faded off.

“Mom? Sally, what’s going on? Why is there so much glitching?”

“The hologram was syncing with me, updating herself with messages downloading to this ship,” Sally said. “Your mother programmed me to provide the latest information to this ship if I arrive.”

“Smart,” I said.

The hologram flashed back on again. Mom’s face flash in front of me, looking like the way she did when I last saw her. “I love you, my daughter.”

Then the hologram burst apart, leaving the air I was staring into where Mom had stood, empty.

For a while, I felt all alone. I felt hollow and empty, as though Mom had left me again.

“Then I heard Sally’s bright voice said, “What’s in the red journal?”

“Do we have time?” I asked Sally.

“Of course, Evie,” Sally said, suddenly sympathetic. “Your mother wanted you to find this journal that you have to read it. You have to read it before you can find her. Perhaps there are clues to where she has gone.”

“At least it will make me feel like she’s here with me,” I said, opening the journal to the first pages and started reading.

“You are safe in here for now,” Sally said. “I do not detect anything else around us in this ship, at least at this part. But outside...they’ve caught up.”

“The Monsters?” I asked.

“Yes, they’ve surrounded the ship. But they could not get in. Being on this ship is the best option for now.”

I remembered what Mom had taught me about the Monsters. They fed on fear. “Reading,” I told Sally.

“Reading has always helped me escape to another world. To keep my mind at peace or at least distracted. I can’t wait to read all about Mom and what happened to everyone on Red Genesis.”

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JANA

First, they came without warning. They came out of nowhere suddenly. Unremarkable and unassuming. No one knew about them until it was too late. There wasn't time for humankind to even give them a name...so they were just called, "The Monsters."

My name is Jana Gee, as in "G" and I am one of the last humans on Earth. When the Monsters first came, we were too busy to notice, caught in our own bickering over now trivial things. Our leaders on Earth didn't notice. Our so-called "experts" didn't notice. No one noticed, until it was too late. Now I am on an evacuation mission to land on a planet barely inhabitable for humans, called New Earth. It is a barren place, which we need to colonize. I have a group of survivors with me, brought on board the Red Genesis to help make this place habitable. There is no turning back. The Monsters on old Earth or Vintage Earth would kill us, but so could anything else on New Earth.

Dear Journal,

I didn't know what I was getting into when I joined the leadership team onboard the magnificent spacecraft called the Red Genesis. By the time I actually boarded Red Genesis, which was the marvel of our space program, the elder scientists and engineers who had worked on the spaceship had already perished, and The Monsters, that came swiftly onto Earth, had already decimated most of humanity.

As a trained mid-level engineer and scientist working remotely at the next space facility a few hours away, I was suddenly the next available one to go, if the only one

left.

I had only marveled at the magnificent spacecraft from afar, outside of the ship itself for years as it was being built. A top-secret craft, I had seen glimpses of its blueprint. It looked like something out of a vintage science fiction film. Round in shape, the Red Genesis was also lighter, faster, and built stronger than any of its previous space travel models.

The concept was simple. It utilized the physics of a flat disc, like a Frisbee, which glide rather than propel, thus requiring less energy and fuel. It resembled the UFO spaceships of the 1950s. Circular with windows; silver metallic. I liked the retro Jetson-style of the 1950s. Like the roadside motels, the missile-shaped RV trailers; the cool retro style embodied the bold spirit of adventure that made Americans and the world go forth and explore.

After most of the passengers had already settled onboard, I walked onto the ship with my vintage-style suitcase, admiring the craftsmanship that went into every detail. While it looked like the spaceship from the 1950s, which was called a flying saucer in those days, the Red Genesis was nothing but old. In its interior, only the latest technology enhanced every detail.

“Wow,” I said to myself, looking from the entrance straight on up. “It’s like a city in here.”

“Like what you see?” a friendly, but deep voice asked from behind me. It came from so close that his warm breath brushed against my ear, causing me to jump.

I turned around, nearly bumping into the tall man behind me.

“Whoa, watch it,” he said, grasping my shoulders to steady me.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I apologized, using my hands to hold onto his hips. They were strong hips on a hard muscular body.

“You can stop handling me now,” the man said, “I’ve got you.”

I quickly snatched my hands down off the man’s body, not realizing that I had not only held onto his hips but had moved my hands up to his narrow waist, hard abs and broad chest. “Oh, I didn’t realize...”

“Sure, sure you didn’t, as they all say,” the man said.

“Wait, hold on,” I muttered, now getting angry instead of embarrassed. What an arrogant S.O.B. “Like I wanted to put my hands on...”

“Admit it, doll,” the man said, “You wanted to feel me up, so you took the opportunity to. I know you couldn’t help it.”

“What the...?” I stammered. “Are you just so full of yourself that you think every woman would...” I stopped as I looked up to see the most amazing warm golden green eyes staring into mine. They were fringed with full dark lashes that matched the dark chocolate of his hair that cascaded over half his face. From the half that I could see, he had a cleft on his chin, full lips, a straight aristocratic nose, and full eyebrows that was turned down into angry wide strokes. Taller than me by almost two heads, he towered over me as I came up to his shoulders wearing my high platform boots.

Darn. He was devastatingly handsome. The kind that makes your heart flutter if he even looks at you. No, if he even looks your way. Movie star, pop idol handsome. No wonder he was used to women throwing themselves at him.

“As you were saying,” the Pop Idol said, his face frozen into an arrogant sneer.

“Of all the people to save on Earth, they had to save an arrogant good-for-nothing diva pop idol,” I said, crossing my arms. “There was only so much room on this ship for survivors, and they picked you to take the place of someone more worthy.”

“Hey, I’m perfectly happy to stay on Earth, but the powers that be wanted me onboard...so here I am,” the gorgeous semi-God answered.

He looked me up and down, his frown turning into a half smile, “Well, if I must be on this ship, they might as well supply the ship with some pretty girls.”

My mouth dropped. “What the... pretty girls?” I said. “Look, I’m not here to be your plaything if that’s what you think I am. And your attitude...”

“What about my attitude, missy?” the Pop Idol asked. “It seems you have an attitude, not me. When is it okay for you to grope me?” His eyes were dancing, but he still looked angry. “I know you couldn’t help yourself, so many women can’t when they come into my presence, but still, I have rights. Just because I look like this...like your book boyfriend dream fantasy come true, doesn’t mean I want to be groped.”

“Oh please,” I said sarcastically. “As if...”

Before I could finish, the Pop Idol walked off in a hurry, leaving me in mid-sentence, looking like a fool. “How rude!” I muttered.

“Jana,” a kind, elderly voice called out to me from my right side. I turned to see a white-haired gentleman in his late sixties approaching.

“Dr. Herbert,” I smiled, happy to recognize the physician, who had contacted me to join the Red Genesis, the only person I knew in the crowd of passengers who had gathered in the large lobby, that resembled the lobby of a high-tech luxury hotel about the size of a shopping mall.

Dr. Herbert reached me and patted me on my shoulders. “Jana, good to see you’ve made it onboard.”

“It was harrowing getting here, which is another story, but I made it.”

Dr. Herbert shook his head. “I’m glad you did. Some of our team weren’t so fortunate.” He looked grim, and I knew what he meant. The Monsters had gotten to them.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I hate to ask because it seems so insensitive, but which ones are we missing still before we can take off?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” Dr. Herbert said. “It’s up to the Captain.”

“Captain Nelson?” I asked.

“No,” Dr. Herbert said. “Unfortunately, he was one of our teammates who didn’t make it here.”

My eyes shot wide open. “Who’s going to captain the ship?” I asked.

Suddenly as if the universe had heard me, a familiar voice answered me in a loud boom over the entire ship. “Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Welcome to the Red Genesis, which will be our home for the next three years until we reach New Earth. Please get settled in and make yourself comfortable. If you will proceed in an orderly manner to the reception area, our staff will get you on your way to your quarters. As you can see, it is a city where we have blocks, shopping areas, recreation, entertainment, and everything to resemble home. Red Genesis is essentially our home, an entire floating and traveling city for the next couple of years. Please take care of it, and please help us maintain it with pride as you would your own home.”

“Entertainment,” I said to Dr. Herbert. “That explains the Pop Idol being onboard.”

“Officers, please meet with me on the deck, um, in 5 minutes. Crew, please shut all doors and get ready to launch. For the rest of you, let us pray for a safe and speedy take-off. This is your captain signing off for now.”

Dr. Herbert turned to me and said, “Come on, let’s meet the new captain.”

I walked with him, towing my rolling suitcase with me to the closest elevator, which was a circular glass elevator that would light up in blue when it was working. While the passengers onboard lined up at the reception area, Dr. Herbert and I quickly made our way into the elevator, which took us to the top floor in less than 2 seconds. “Wow,” I said, “We went from level zero all the way to the 15th floor before I could even take a breath.”

Dr. Herbert smiled. “Yes, that was Dr. Patricia Beard’s idea. No time to waste, she used to say.” He sighed.

I nodded, noting the brilliance of my predecessor, who had helped build the Red Genesis, but didn’t get to live to see it take off today.

We walked out of the elevator and onto a rolling walkway down a series of hallway. “Dr. Beard’s idea, too?” I asked.

Dr. Herbert smiled again. “No time to waste.”

In about a minute and a half, we stepped off and walked towards the Deck where the new captain was standing, facing forward, looking out of the large window in front of him, while his back was towards us.

Surrounding him was a row of beeping lights like switches and buttons in a control

room or an engineering sound room similar to a recording studio, only it was the controls for the Red Genesis. Flat screens of places all over the ship were placed into the walls. Flat screens showing the exterior of the ship were also shown.

There was where my eyes immediately focused on. The exterior of the ship. The doors and all entrance way had been shut tight, but outside, there was something sinister going around. The same dark cloud that had become a living nightmare for the last week had formed close to the ship.

“Officers!” the new captain said, still staring at the cameras pointing to outside the ship. “We must leave now. The ship is already feeling their presence. If we stay on the ground any longer, they will seep inside and infiltrate us.” He turned around to face us.

Dr. Herbert, me, and a few other officers joined us now as we faced our new captain.

My mouth opened as I stared into the very same warm golden green eyes I had just nearly melted under.

Our new captain was none other than the arrogant and infuriating Pop Idol who already seemed to hate me.

EVIE

“Wow,” I said to Sally. “Mom sounded so young here. I always thought Mom was Mom, but here, she’s like me. Just a girl.”

“Read on,” Sally said. “The young woman you’re just reading about must have gone through quite a lot in order to be transformed into the Jana I know who built the Shelter and who made me.”

“Who became my mother,” I said.

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JANA

“My name is Thomas,” the new captain said. “And up to a few minutes ago, when I boarded Red Genesis, I was Second in Command. Unfortunately, Captain Nelson didn’t make it onboard so I will now be resuming his role. I was his apprentice, and he was like a father to me so I will still refer to him as the Captain, while you can just call me Thomas.”

He shook his head, his eyes had filled with tears. “Unfortunately there is no time to mourn everyone we’ve already lost. The Monsters, you can see is at our doors. We need to take our position now to get this ship in the air. If not, we will not be able to take off, and we will all die.”

“Yes, Captain Thomas,” the group behind me said.

“Thomas,” I corrected softly. Isn’t that what he said to call him?

As if he had heard me, Thomas’s golden green eyes shot over to me. It nearly made my heart stop. What was with his breathtakingly good looks that could cause my entire body to react like some kind of spastic octopus? Like I would react in such an uncoordinated and uncommonly klutzy way? If anything, I was well-coordinated and had very good control over my body. I was a trained martial artist after all, which I was proud to admit, having trained in the art of kung fu’s Wing Chung style since I was a child. Wing Chung was the form most empowering for a woman, which made use of every ounce a woman’s body would have to collect and push into a force of power. In other words, women warriors favor the Wing Chung style since it was developed by a woman for a woman’s body as a form of self-defense.

He picked up a clipboard and ran through everyone's name. When it came to mine, he stepped forward, his chest nearly touching mine. "We meet again," he said. He looked at his clipboard. "You must be Jana," he said. He blinked before looking back at me again. "It suits you. You look like a Jana." He looked stunned for a bit, but he went on. "It says here that you're the Engineer? Also a scientist. An architect. A martial artist. Graduated top of your class with Honors. And a former beauty pageant winner."

"To get a college scholarship," I said stiffly.

"You?" he blinked his eyes in disbelief.

I couldn't believe him. "What?" I asked. "It's too hard to believe that I could be any of those things?"

He actually laughed. "Yup, except the beauty pageant part. Engineer? You? It requires brute strength to lift some of the parts and..."

"Martial artists..." I said. "I can handle it."

"Not that I doubt you can handle it, but I don't think you know how heavy some of those parts are that you may have to maintain and build. I mean, you're going to be maintaining this ship and when we get to New Earth, you will be building the Shelter. You're petite, feminine, and..." he laid his hand on my shoulder.

With one hand, I grabbed his hand, took it off my shoulder, and flipped him to the ground before I straddled him, keeping him pinned to the ground with my weight. "Tell me again that I'm not up to the job, then you'll find yourself in a worse position than this."

Thomas chuckled from the ground. "Wow, that surprised me. You got me, now let

me up.”

I took my knee from the back of his spine and took his hand to pull him up.

When he stood up, he brushed off his clothes and said with a straight face, “I guess I need to apologize about that.” He turned to everyone and said, “Everyone to your positions, including you, Jana.”

“Which is where?” I asked. “I don’t exactly sit up here in front of the controls.”

“No, you don’t, but you need to be near so you can check out things when I ask you to. So, your position, Jana, would be right next to me or close to me so you can hear me.” He leaned closer. “I want you close enough to me so you can hear my every demand. My every want and desire.”

I gulped. Whether it was the heat radiating between us that was making me flush or it was my imagination going where steamy romance novels would go, I couldn’t help fanning myself. “It’s pretty warm in here,” I said. “Maybe I need to check out the temperature control of the ship.”

He gestured to a panel on the wall near us. “Close to me,” he said. He winked.

I wrinkled my nose at him, a habit I did when I was angry but had to hold it back.

He looked at me with an amused smile and said, “How cute. You look like a bunny rabbit just now. What are you? Like 10 years old?”

“No,” I muttered under my breath. “I’m 25 years old.”

Thomas looked surprised and said, “You look younger. That explains some of your experience.”

“How old are you, Pop Idol Boy?” I asked.

“Just a little older than you, Bunny,” he said. It took a while for him to register what I called him. He laughed and said, “Pop Idol Boy? Is that what you think I am? How insulting. I’m far too macho to be in a boy band, and dancing around. I went to West Point, then received my graduate degree, did a few years in Air Force before entering the space program.”

“How old are you then,” I asked.

“I’m 28 years old,” Thomas said. “I had one more year to go before I would be able to captain my own ship, under the guidance of Captain Nelson. A smaller ship, though. Who knew I would be captaining the Red Genesis?”

“I wasn’t supposed to be the Chief Engineer of the Red Genesis, too,” I said. “But I guessed no one else was around.”

“So, let’s do our best,” Thomas said. “We can only hope for the best.” At that, he turned to me and said, “Take your seat and strap down.” He sat down in the captain’s chair and pulled down a lever to hold him in place, similar to the steel straps found on roller coaster rides.

Speaking into the mic, he said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, prepare for launch. Strap down now, make sure all your loose items are in their lockers and have been secured.”

He looked around to see that his crew and the other officers were all secure before he gave the countdown.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two and one,” he calmly said. “Take off!” He pushed down on a lever, and from the screen ahead, showing the camera

facing the ship, I could see the ship had already lifted, the jets below Red Genesis acting as boosters sending us up into the sky and then to space. Faster than anything I've ever seen.

Getting through Earth's atmosphere was rough at first, with the entire ship shaking as though we were in an earthquake. For several minutes, the ship seemed to fight gravity, as we felt ourselves pulled down, a heavy weight on all of us. Had it not been for the chair I was strapped down into, I would have fallen onto the floor, plastered like a flattened bug.

The tumbling and shaking seemed to go on and on forever.

There was an unearthly silence as everyone onboard seemed to hold onto their breath, praying we'd get out of the turbulence intact and alive.

I was straining against the chair, hoping and praying for it to stop. Will it be like this the entire way to New Earth? Will it ever stop?

After some time, I felt the easing of the weight. A sudden lurch and lifting as though the ship itself had a heavy burden lifted from its shoulders.

A lightness filled the ship, and then we seemed to be floating.

At that point, Thomas reached over to release a lever, and the ship seemed to level off. The lightness adjusted, and my body settled into the chair in a normal position.

Thomas clicked on the mic and said, "Congratulations everyone, we have left Earth and is now on our way to New Earth. I have leveled off the ship, and you are free to move about the ship."

He turned to me and said, "How's that for a first timer?"

“Not bad,” I said. “Not bad for a Pop Idol Boy.”

He gave me a cold stare, which made my stomach flutter. He was drop dead sexy when he looked deadly. Then he gave me a thumbs up. “You’re not bad either, Bunny.”

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EVIE

“Dad,” I said. “You were so swoon-worthy, the way Mom described you. “Thomas was Dad,” I sighed. “And Old Earth... the people there must have been so desperate to leave their planet to go off to space without knowing what would happen out there.”

JANA

There was a collective sigh of relief as the officers and crew on deck unbuckled themselves and began moving around. Dr. Herbert came towards me and Thomas. “Sir, that was a perfect launch, if anything,” he said to Thomas. “I’ve been on all the test launches, and none had gone as smoothly as this.”

“Thank you, Dr. Herbert,” Thomas said, breaking out into a grin. “Well, let’s just say it’s beginner’s luck.”

Dr. Herbert’s eyebrows shot up in exclamation.

Thomas patted Dr. Herbert’s shoulders and said, “Nah, I had one test flight beforehand. Now, can you show Jana her room and then the Engineer’s department? I understand you worked with her predecessor?”

“Yes, of course,” Dr. Herbert said, taking my suitcase to help lead the way.

“No, that’s okay,” I said, reaching for the handle of my rolling suitcase. “I can take my own luggage.” I was after all, raised to respect the elder, and Dr. Herbert was a

good thirty years older than me. He was old enough to be my father.

“Nonsense,” Dr. Herbert said. “I may look older but I’m as strong as an ox.”

I looked him over. He did walk as sprightly as a man half his age.

“Before I signed up for this team,” Dr. Herbert said, “I had a physical, and it showed that I’m in great shape.” He did a jump in the air, showing he was flexible and still coordinated. I laughed.

“You could give Michael Jordan, the famous basketball player, a run,” I said.

“Speaking of basketball,” Dr. Herbert said, “We have a nice gym with a basketball court. Every crew member and officer is required to join a team.”

“Why?” I asked.

“To keep in shape, to provide entertainment for the passengers,” Dr. Herbert said. “To keep up morale. It’s important to build community. And for team-building amongst us.”

I nodded. “I understand. After all, we’re going to get to know each other pretty well on this ship for the next three years and after when we end up building the first colonies in the new world.”

“Exactly,” Dr. Herbert said. He walked through a few more hallways and then to a quiet corridor that resembled a modern hip hotel’s hallway. “And this,” he said, “Is our quarters. The Officers’ Quarters.”

He stopped in front of a door with the number Seven on it. Taking out a card from his pocket, he swiped across the door. “I hope you like purple,” he said.

I groaned. “Really? Purple?”

He opened the door and said, “Welcome to Jana’s Castle!”

I looked inside and grinned. “This isn’t so bad.” The purple Dr. Herbert was talking about was an interchangeable light color scheme that I could switch out to another room color easily. I stepped inside and was immediately transported into a resort oasis on a beach with sparkling blue water, white sand, and palm trees. “Not bad at all,” I said.

“So that’s where you’d like to be,” Dr. Herbert said. “The room has a mood and setting mind reader device that instantly adjusts to the setting you’d like to be.”

“Cool,” I said. “A smart room.”

“That it is,” Dr. Herbert said.

I walked outside of the bungalow-type house to the white sand of the beach. The sand was fine like dust underneath my boots. “This feels so real,” I said.

“The room is very smart,” Dr. Herbert said. “It adjusts to the very minute details that makes your setting appear real. So real, even your mind might get fool to think you really have visited Bora Bora or someplace you’ve dreamt of going.”

“Wow,” I said. “How many settings does this room have?”

“All the rooms on board Red Genesis have almost a million settings,” Dr. Herbert said. “And, my dear Jana,” he smiled, reaching into his pocket to pull out a pendant. “In here, there is a database of the settings and more.” He handed the pendant to me. “You’re now in charge of this database. Along with the ones you will find in the next room I will show you. As the Engineer of Red Genesis, you will be in charge of

maintaining the database no matter what happens.”

“Sure,” I said. “I know all the systems and protocols.”

“Then you will be able to build the right environment to house the database when we get to New Earth,” Dr. Herbert said. “You’re an architect as well.”

“Yes,” I said. “I know how to build a structure that would protect the database as best I can.”

“Good,” Dr. Herbert said. He looked around at the beach, the palm trees, the blue sparkling water.” He sighed, “I miss Earth already. I’m glad you have this picturesque setting of Earth in your memory. Someday it may be the only setting linking us back to Earth.”

The more I gaze at the waves and calmness of the beach setting, the more I could see the pixels and fabric of the facade against the walls of my room.

New Earth was known to be barren, dry like a desert with no beaches, palm trees, and gentle breezes.

The atmosphere on New Earth was harsh and almost inhabitable thus my job as the Engineer would be to help create an underground colony for our human population to live.

“I’m going to miss Earth, too,” I said. “But it’s better than having the entire human race face extinction.”

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JANA - Three Months Later

Hello Journal, in case you've forgotten who owns you, I'm Jana Gee.

It's been three months since I've written in here because I have been incredibly busy. Non-stop busy and constantly on-the-go.

With a population of nearly 2000 people on Red Genesis along with about twenty-thousand animal, plants, birds, and aquatic species; being the only Engineer onboard who had some knowledge of the climate requirements of all the species and even fussy humans; had been one ordeal after another.

Then there was the monitoring and slight repair work of the ship itself which was almost an entire job. The atmospheric pressure on the ship was rougher than anyone had anticipated, which caused instruments to erode faster. But thanks to the remarkable expertise of the cockiest Captain across the Galaxies, Captain Thomas, we were able to utilize less fuel and more gliding, lessening the impact overall.

When it came to Thomas, I had to admit, he was a surprise. Still cockier than anyone I've ever met, but more competent, intelligent, gifted, and charismatic than anyone too. He was a mystery to me, and someone who just seemed to have the talent to push my buttons more than anyone could.

"Hey Bunny," he said, walking by as I looked over some instruments at the lower deck. I haven't seen him in weeks, and when I did, he was always busy talking to the passengers, organizing and hosting socials for them, holding meetings with the Officers and Crew, reading reports. He seemed to be everywhere and anywhere when

I've seen him, and always surrounded by people, especially women. Young and old. The ladies couldn't seem to get enough of him, always asking him for help or to join them for something or another.

"Hi, Thomas," I said, intentionally leaving off the word, "Captain" which he had once told me was unnecessary. "Fancy seeing you down here in the Engineering area. What's up?"

He was alone for once, and it seemed so unlike him. He looked around, as if he was checking things out. "I wanted to check on the fuel," he said.

As if he didn't know where to look and as if he didn't get the daily reports on the level of fuel we had, I pointed to the screen on the side wall, which gave a reading on barometric pressure, fuel, and whatever we needed to monitor for Red Genesis to run smoothly. "Is there something you needed to know?" I asked.

Thomas frowned for a second and said, "I wonder if we sped up the ship a bit more so we can arrive at New Earth half a year earlier than what we had planned, how that would affect the ship."

I did the calculations and said, "It can be done, but it would increase the usage of everything, causing us to deplete whatever we have stored completely. In other words," I said. "We have better land on New Earth right on time or we may run out of fuel completely in space."

"I see," Thomas said. He frowned again, shaking his head. I could see whatever he was thinking about was really worrying him only he said nothing for a while.

"What's going on, Thomas?" I asked moving close. "Do we have to try to land earlier than planned?"

He looked at me as if he was contemplating something heavy on his mind, weighing his shoulders down. Finally, he said, “I don’t want anyone to panic. I don’t know if it’s certain yet, but yes, we may have to try to land earlier.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I know you tested the highest in psychological and emotional stability, Jana,” Thomas said, “Out of all the passengers on the Red Genesis, you came in close to my score on strength of will. Maybe slightly higher.”

“You just said I came in the highest,” I said, almost teasingly.

He smiled and then ran his hand over his hair, “Maybe slightly higher than me.”

“You really are the most arrogant person I’ve ever met,” I said.

He actually laughed this time and said, “Yeah, you’ve told me a couple of times since the first day we’ve met.”

“Knowing how my mind works then, Captain,” I said, “you can tell me the truth and I won’t panic.”

Thomas smiled, “That’s what I like about you, Bunny.”

“Jana,” I corrected him.

He moved in a little closer to me, almost to the point where I could feel the heat of his presence. “But I love calling you my pet name for you. You’re pretty cute like a bunny.”

“Please,” I said, walking past him to stand in the hallway.

“Hey, having a nickname like ‘Bunny’ isn’t so bad compared to the nickname you gave me – ‘Pop Idol Boy’, which is pretty insulting to have when you’re the captain of a ship this size.”

“Well, it suits you,” I said. “Three months later, and you still remind me of a Pop Idol.”

“What...because I enjoy going on stage in the concert hall and entertaining the passengers with my singing and dancing abilities?” Thomas asked.

“Uh huh,” I said. “That and everything else,” I pointed to the way he was dressed.

“I like to dress fashionably,” Thomas said. “My hair, too. Nothing wrong with that.”

“No,” I said, “But really, Thomas, were you ever in a boy band? Did you ever post dancing videos on Tik Tok or whatever social media platform like that? You seem to fit right in with the bad boy Pop Idol type. And you must love all that attention from the girls.”

“Truthfully,” Thomas said, “I was in a boy band, I hate to admit it.”

My mouth dropped, “Nah, really? No way. I was just joking about all that...”

Thomas shook his head. “Yes, really. Ever heard of Space Boyz?”

I thought hard. “Sounds vaguely familiar.”

He pulled out his pocket-size computer called the Zipline because of how it was the fastest portable data and voice communication system on Earth. “Ever seen this?”

I looked over at the photo he was showing me. Three young men wearing silver suits

with slicked back blue, green, and red hair. One was playing the keyboards, while the other one was on drums, and another on guitar. My eyes shot wide open. “You mean you were in this boy band?” I asked. “You’re huge!” I blinked my eyes again. “So huge! Why did you stop?”

“That was me about ten years ago,” Thomas said. “I got tired of the lifestyle and decided to pursue my passion about space. That’s how I got into the space program.”

“But you’re still able to entertain our passengers better than anyone else,” I said. “We lucked out having you as a captain.”

Thomas’ eyes shot wide, and his eyebrows lifted, “You really think so?”

“Yeah,” I said, walking away. “So, that was the big secret? You were in a boy band for real... well, that’s good to know. If you’ll excuse me, Captain, I have to get over to the other side of the ship to check on the plantation. Our system is doing well enough growing the plants on board, but I have to check the atmosphere there once a week.”

“Good,” Thomas said, seemingly relieved that we were ending this conversation.

As I made my way over to the other side of the ship to our horticulture and garden area where farmers and plant experts had already grown fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers in pods, I noticed the area was empty. It was dinner time, and most likely everyone was in the restaurants or food court area where meals were being served.

An atrium of exotic plants was held in one area, which needed specialized temperature. I walked over to the atrium and felt instantly transported to the tropical jungles of Old Earth. The smells, the sounds of jungle wildlife, and even the moisture in the air felt so real.

I noticed another person in the Atrium besides myself. Someone I've not met before. "Hello?" I asked, approaching the bald man who was dressed in a drab colorless shirt and pants, almost like prison garb. He didn't respond. "Hello?" I asked again, getting closer.

He was staring out into the space as though in a daze.

"Hi," I said again. "They're serving dinner now. If you want to get something to eat, now's the time..." My instincts instantly warned me to be careful as the man suddenly turned towards me, his face grey while his eyes had gone completely pupilless.

"Oh," I gulped.

In an instant, the man or whatever it was had leaped towards me like a gigantic spider.

A hand pushed me out of the way, "Go!"

I fell to the ground but crawled back up, watching as Thomas fight the creature with a thick wooden staff. Like a kung-fu master, Thomas leaped in the air, hitting the staff on the creature's head, while twirling it around to hit it in the back of its knees, knocking it to the ground.

The creature sprawled out flat on the floor, motionless.

"Are you hurt?" Thomas turned to me. "Did he touched you anywhere?"

"No," I shook my head. "You stopped him before he could get close to me."

Thomas' face relaxed, and he gave a big sigh of relief. "For a moment there, I was

really worried. I thought...”

“Watch out!” I yelled, running towards him and shoving him out of the way. The creature had gotten up and was about to stab Thomas in the back with its long spear-like arm when I blocked its arm with a kick and went down on my knees to side-sweep its legs out from under him. He fell backwards but jumped up with a half flip to land on his feet, surprising me with a sudden spear punch into my right shoulder, spearing through my muscles straight through. “Ouch!” I yelled stumbling backwards.

Thomas caught me before I fell back, the searing pain burning through me like hot metal. He laid me gently on the ground before taking his staff up and leaping straight at the creature. The creature blocked Thomas’ blow with both its arms, then pushed up with a strength of several men. Thomas went flying through the air, landing on the ground on the opposite side of the Atrium.

“You,” the creature finally spoke. Its pupil-less eyes gaze at me. “You must die.”

“Not if I can help it,” I said, pulling out my metal cross pendant from my neck and wrapping the chain around my fist.

“You two, the mother and father of the new human must not live to have this human. You two must not procreate, must not bring forth the new human...”

I looked over at Thomas, who looked just as confused as I was. Before I could turn my head back to look at the creature, it was no longer in front of me.

“Where did it go?” I asked Thomas.

Thomas shook his head. Then he slowly looked up.

Out several feet above us, the creature was plastered flat against the ceiling of the Atrium's dome like a spider easily hanging upside down.

"Watch out!" Thomas yelled out as the creature came flying towards us with the speed of a falcon. The creature nearly side-swiped Thomas, as I leaped out of the way.

"The mother of the future new human!" the creature hissed. "You of all must be eliminated." It rushed like lightning towards me, hitting me in the chest as I slammed into the glass wall of the Atrium, breaking chunks of it in pieces.

"Jana!" Thomas yelled out.

"Thomas!" I cried out. My body was exploding in a myriad of pain.

The creature grinned as it brought its spear-like hands close to my chest, ready to puncture me through with it straight in the heart. He had me pinned against the shattered wall of the Atrium. Not even Thomas can get through to save me. "You will be no longer," the creature hissed.

This was not how I wanted things to end. This was not my mission. To end in defeat was unacceptable.

"No!" I yelled out as strongly as I could. "I will not let you have any power over me, you Monster," I pushed back with all my force. "You will not harm me or my future child." I raised my fist wrapped with my necklace and spiked with my cross using its sharp edges like a ninja star and pushed it through the chest of the creature as hard as I could. "I command you to leave now in God, my father's name! Go back to hell!" I shouted into its ugly face.

My fist went straight through the creature like butter as if it held no resistance to the

force and power in my hand. Then the creature's entire body exploded, turning into black mist.

I felt the heaviness lifted and could see straight through to Thomas who was standing in awe in front of me.

Realizing that I had held my breath the entire time after the creature vanished, I finally breathed.

Thomas seemed to catch his breath too. Then I was in his arms as he held me tight. "Jana," he said so softly like a prayer. "Jana, my girl," he leaned in to kiss my forehead. "Are you alright? Are you..." he stared into my eyes for the longest time before he groaned, "Oh screw it!"

Then his lips were on mine. And I was kissing him back.

How long were we kissing, wrapped in each other's arms, I couldn't tell. But that night, when we emerged out of the Atrium, it was way past dinnertime.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:24 am

JANA - 5 Months Later

Dear Journal,

I apologize for not writing in here more often. Since my last entry, things have become even busier. Not just because Thomas and I had become a “thing” but because the creature that had attacked us was a wake-up call to everyone onboard that we had not truly escaped the problems on Old Earth.

We have Monsters onboard.

We didn't know where the one who had attacked us came from. We didn't know if it was the only one. But the reason Thomas had visited me in the Engineering room before I saw the Monster in the Atrium was because he had suspicions that there was a Monster onboard.

Without wanting to panic everyone so that the Monster would attack, Thomas came to me to ask whether we had enough fuel to get to New Earth faster. Now I knew why.

Shortly after being attacked by the Monster, Thomas showed me the body of a woman who had died mysteriously onboard the Red Genesis. He kept it in a frozen vault, away from all the passengers, in a room that was specifically built to isolate someone or something from the other passengers. “Do you think it was the same creature who attacked us?” I asked. “Any evidence that it could be anything or anyone else?”

“I did an autopsy myself,” Thomas said.

I raised my eyebrows. “Don’t tell me you’re a doctor too? I’m impressed.”

“No, but I watched enough surgeries and spent enough time as a volunteer medic out in the field to learn all about the human body,” Thomas said. “I’ll know something is not normal when I see it. And everything about this woman was normal except for the swollen heart and the tremendous terror in her eyes.”

“Most people couldn’t even look into a monster’s eyes or at it at all without becoming so terrified that they shrivel up with fear and die on the spot, like this woman,” I said. I turned around to look at her. “That is it, isn’t it? The swollen heart from the heightened heart rate and beating...and the look of terror on her face. This woman did die the same way most of the human population on Old Earth did...the Monsters.”

Thomas looked at me then and said, “If we announce this to everyone onboard, their combined fear alone will attract the Monsters onboard.”

“That’s why you had all these activities, events, and even your singing and other entertainment like our basketball games, planned.”

“When you’re busy having fun or keeping busy with things that you love or find funny,” Thomas smiled, “you stop being fearful.”

“Good plan,” I said. “Keep everyone occupied and busy with fun activities.”

“You’re part of the plan, too,” Thomas said. “It’s been three months since we left Earth, but already you have the most-liked ratings on the ship, and you know there was a poll on me where the passengers have been shipping me with you.”

“So, this is your way of asking me to date you?” I asked.

Thomas grinned, “If it works...”

“Depends,” I said.

“On what?” Thomas asked.

“If you’re hot boyfriend material or if you’re just a player,” I said, crossing my arms.

“I’m sure you can have your pick of ladies onboard...”

Thomas wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me close, “But I want you, Jana,” he kissed me gently at first. Then he started kissing me more passionately.

Five months later, I couldn’t believe I would be where I was standing right now.

In front of the altar at the Good Shepherd Church that was onboard the Red Genesis. Dressed in a beautiful white chiffon strapless gown embroidered with silver lace and pearls, I stood facing Thomas as he wore the full uniform of the Captain of the Red Genesis. He was so handsome; I couldn’t believe I was marrying him.

“I’m so lucky,” he whispered into my ears. “I’m marrying the most beautiful, the most kind, and the most intelligent woman I never could have imagined I could be marrying. I’m beyond blessed, Jana. I love you so much, my Bunny,” he said, squeezing my hands in his.

As the minister, an attractive woman in her forties who could have been my own mother, Maura Sinclair, based on her looks, said the remaining vows and the words, “You may kiss the bride,” the entire ship was filled with applause and cheers from all

the passengers, crew, and officers.

The party afterwards was non-stop.

When Thomas and I finally danced our last dance of the night together as a couple, I could barely keep my eyes open. “My feet’s killing me,” I said to him.

“Me, too,” he said.

“I think I danced with every man and some ladies twice or even three times,” I said. “That’s like about a thousand times.”

“More,” Thomas said, staring into my eyes and smiling. “I still can’t believe it, Bunny,” he said. “I’m hitched to you.”

“You’re hitched to me?” I asked. “I’m hitched to you.”

“You asked me to marry you,” he said. “Like I predicted, you would be begging me to make new humans together.”

I playfully slapped his shoulders, “Oh please!”

“So, Dominant One,” Thomas said, “Tonight, I’m all yours to ravage.”

“Oh, please!” I said sarcastically.

“You’ll be saying, ‘Oh, Thomas, please please please,’” Thomas said in a high pitch, trying to imitate a girl.

“Um huh,” I said. Suddenly I was feeling all warm, fuzzy, tired, and wobbly.

A look of concern came over Thomas' face, "What's the matter, Jana?"

"I don't know," I said. "Too much dancing, drinking, working..."

He lifted me into his arms and said, "Time to hit the sack, Bunny." He looked up and walked to the podium to talk into the microphone, "Thanks everyone for being an important part of me and Jana's new life together. We've been together as a family on the Red Genesis for a while now, and it does feel like we're all family. Thank you again, and wow, guys, I'm the luckiest man alive!"

He took off with me in his arms as the entire crowd burst out in loud laughter. The men cheered, while the ladies sighed, saying, "Another good one's taken, girls."

I smiled, right before I blanked out.

"Jana? Jana?" Thomas' voice drifted from somewhere in the corner of my mind. His voice came out of the red skies of the barren red desert landscape of my dreams. I was walking in a silver suit with a clear helmet that allowed me to see all around me.

"She should be waking up now," I heard an older male voice said. Dr. Herbert.

Dr. Herbert? The ship? Red Genesis?

I opened my eyes.

Dr. Herbert said, "Captain, she's awake."

"Thomas?" I called out.

A large warm hand squeezed mine, “I’m here, Bunny,” he said. “Oh, thank God you’re awake! For a moment there, I...” his voice broke.

Dr. Herbert patted me on the shoulder and said, “You were out for weeks, Jana.”

“Weeks?” I croaked. My throat was parched. “I remembered dancing, kissing Thomas, and then nothing...”

“Jana,” Thomas said, “You blacked out on our wedding night, and we couldn’t figure out what was wrong with you. Physically, there was nothing wrong. But you couldn’t wake up. We couldn’t wake you up. I was so worried. I thought you would be in a coma for a long, long time.”

I stared at Thomas, trying to remember what I had just awoken from and where was I. The dreams...or nightmares. Did it mean something? “I was on a barren desert-like place. There was so much red. But there was something else too. A darkness. It was trying to penetrate through me, trying to poison me from within.”

Thomas and Dr. Herbert exchanged glances.

I continued on, “I had a hard time breathing. I had a mask on that felt suffocating. The air outside was toxic, and if I breathed it in, I would choke and die.”

“Jana,” Thomas said, looking over at Dr. Herbert. “What you’re describing...it sounds a lot like New Earth.”

“How would I know what it is like on New Earth?” I asked. “I mean I know what it is like through facts that we’ve gathered, but I have no idea what it would feel like to be there.”

“You could be putting the facts together from everything you know about New Earth

and imagining what it would be like,” Dr. Herbert said.

“Or,” Thomas said, “Jana may have something special that we didn’t know about her. That she didn’t even know herself about.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“You saw the darkness in your dream,” Thomas said. “You could sense it. That’s how it starts. The Monsters. They live in the dark, but then attack humans when they least expect it. Jana’s different. She can sense them. She can see them arriving. No other humans could before.”

“No other human had survived being attacked, being stabbed through, like Jana has and had lived,” Dr. Herbert said. “Didn’t you say the Monster said that Jana and her future human must be destroyed?”

“That’s it!” I said. “I must have received some of the creature’s abilities. I can sense when another one of them is near so I can’t be surprised or snuck up on by them.”

Thomas’ eyes lit up. “And you have a sight of the future...on the New Earth. You could see into the future like the creature could see into the future.”

“Somehow,” I said, “I’ve absorbed a part of the creature’s essence when I was attacked but survived.”

Thomas and Dr. Herbert looked at each other with excitement. “This means we have hope, Jana!” Thomas said.

“Yes,” Dr. Herbert echoed. “Hope!”

“Because if we can see those invisible stealthy Monsters coming ahead of time, and

we can foresee the future of them, too,” Thomas said.

“We have a chance to fight back,” I said.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:24 am

JANA

2 years Later

Dear Journal,

I was beginning to show. The bump I was showing was barely a bump, but on me, it showed. My uniform on the Red Genesis was unforgiving on me. Designed to withstand certain extreme temperatures, the sleek lightweight slacks made of skin-hugging breathable dri-weave fabric that would be as cool as possible on New Earth's scorching temperature but can warm up with layers when the temperature was freezing; was also close to skin tight.

"Bunny," Thomas said, looking at me as I walked out onto the Captain's Deck, "you're glowing." He came over to me, his face beaming. "You're finally showing, Bunny."

It had taken us a couple of years for me to get pregnant. In the meantime, it had been a suspenseful two years for Thomas and I, running Red Genesis while also working as a team trying to protect it from the creatures that would emerge out of nowhere as Monsters. It was a lot to handle, especially since it was just the two of us fighting off the Monsters.

We could not allow anyone to know there were Monsters onboard the Red Genesis. Fear was what fueled them. If anyone knew about them, their collective fear would overrun the ship with Monsters.

So, it had been an exhausting two years fighting off each Monster that I would first sense, see, and then alert Thomas to, while I ran ahead to fight it off. With a few appearing here and there throughout the two years, fighting off the Monsters were manageable at first. Then after I became pregnant, they began appearing more frequently.

Although I was pregnant, I could still fight. But now, I couldn't hide my pregnancy amongst the crew and the passengers. Thomas and I would have to make a decision.

"Bunny," Thomas said, "I know we want to minimize the spread of panic, but I think the passengers and crew would be happy to find out we're expecting." He took my hands while I looked nervously around at the Officers busy working on the Captain's Deck. "We're about a month away from landing on New Earth, Jana," he said, smiling happily. "It's time we share our good news with the rest of the Red Genesis family."

I looked down at my growing bump while Thomas pulled me to his chest in a hug. He turned me around and said, "Bunny, having an expectant mother onboard Red Genesis is going to make everyone help protect you and the baby. We can't keep fighting the Monsters on our own."

"It's time," I smiled, agreeing with Thomas. "I want to be careful with my pregnancy. I don't want to lose our baby..."

"We won't, Jana," he said. "That's why we would need others to know about the situation. It should help."

"Okay," I said.

"Let's make the announcement together," Thomas said.

I nodded, then I turned around in Thomas' arms to face the crew.

"Announcement!" Thomas called out. "I need everyone to look up for this announcement."

Everyone looked up from their station and looked over at us, expectantly.

Thomas looked down at me and lovingly said, "Jana and I are expecting!"

There was silence for a few seconds before the crew started clapping and shouting, "Congratulations!"

Dr. Herbert came forward and said, "I suspected. But now I know for sure. Congratulations, you two! We will have the first human born on New Earth! Your child."

Thomas and I smiled at each other. "We will be on New Earth with a new colony in less than one month," Thomas said.

"Congratulations, you two!" Officer Billy Boyd said. She was a petite woman in charge of communications on board the Red Genesis. "Is this just something for crew to know or can I share it to the rest of the passengers on the ship? This is exciting."

"You can go ahead and announce it to everyone," Thomas said.

"How about we announce it at dinner," Billy said.

"Sure," I said.

"Everyone's going to go crazy," Billy said. "This is good news for their morale. Thank God we're almost at the end of the trip. The passengers are getting antsy. It's

no wonder after being on the ship for almost three years.”

“Yes, we’re almost there,” I said. “I can’t wait.”

“See you in about an hour,” Billy said to me and Thomas. “I want you two there in the main restaurant food atrium when I announce the news. Everyone would like to congratulate you, so you better be there.”

“We will be,” I said. I looked down at my tablet, which was beeping. “But I need to go to the Engineering Deck to check out something.” I turned to Thomas.

“I’ll see both of you later, too,” Thomas said, kissing me. He looked over at a screen on the front of the main panel. It was beeping too. “I have to check this out.”

“Go do your Captain-y duties, Babe,” I said.

“Go do your Engineering-y things, Bunny,” Thomas said, patting my butt. “Be careful with yourself and let me know if you need me. No matter what.”

“I will,” I said walking out the door with Billy.

When Billy and I closed the door and walked over to the elevator, Billy said, “Aren’t you such a lucky lady. First you captured the most eligible man’s heart on Red Genesis, then you two are going to have the cutest baby. I envy you so much, Jana. I’ve had a crush on Thomas for so long, ever since we worked together on the last two practice flights.”

I looked at the pretty red head who could easily catch any man on the ship or anywhere on Earth. “I had no idea you were interested in Thomas.”

She laughed bitterly. “Who wouldn’t be? He’s the total package.”

We walked into the elevator together. “Well, I do notice how so many guys seemed interested in you. Why haven’t you tried dating any of them?”

Billy rolled his eyes. “You know why.”

“Thomas,” I said.

Billy nodded. She looked down at my belly. Her eyes were filled with sadness. As she gazed down at my bump, she reached over to try to touch it, but instinctively I pulled back.

That’s why I saw the dark shadow standing behind her. Then it disappeared into her. Her eyes turned completely black and pupil-less. “Billy?”

“Her fear of a hopeless loveless future summoned me. Her hatred towards you and your future child fueled us,” a deep voice said out of her mouth. The creature lunged at me as I jumped out of the way.

I pulled off my cross pendant, wrapping it around my fist and blocked Billy’s claws reaching towards my belly.

“I must destroy you and the new human,” the creature hissed.

“No!” I yelled out and side-stepped another swipe from the creature.

I didn’t want to hurt Billy, but I couldn’t let the Monster kill me and my baby. With a quick jump, I punched Billy’s face as hard as I could, “Get back to hell you ugly stupid witch!” I slapped her a few more times, yelling, “In Jesus’ name, I order your butt back to the ugly farm now!” It was the first name I could think of, remembering my mother Maura and Grandmother Shelby’s teachings of faith growing up. Everything is possible through God, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

A loud scream shook the elevator as Billy's mouth opened wide and a stream of black tar-like substance oozed out of her. When the substance evaporated into the air, Billy's body collapsed to the floor of the elevator.

I ran over to her and tried waking up her unconscious body. "Billy?" I shook her. "Billy? Wake up!" I took her pulse and practically fell back.

Billy was dead.

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JANA

The elevator opened at the lobby floor where Billy was heading. It was the floor two stops before my Engineering floor.

I was not ready for what met me.

Two of the passengers lunged toward me. Growling and hunkered over, their eyes had turned black and pupil-less. “What’s going on?” I yelled. I tapped my communication device by my side to call Thomas. “Thomas! They’re Monsters. Lobby area. I’m surrounded.”

Thomas answered back, “I’m almost there. Get back into the elevator and go to another floor.”

“But what about you?” I asked, kicking out to the two passengers to push them back before I closed the elevator doors.

“I’m in the staircase. I’m tracking you. Take care of yourself, Jana. I’ll find you.”

As the doors closed, I pressed the button for the Engineering floor. My tablet was still beeping. Something was wrong and it didn’t register on the screen what. I tapped my device to talk to Thomas. “Thomas, Engineering floor. Must check out the Red Alert there.”

Thomas didn’t answer.

I pressed the device again and said, “Thomas? Thomas?”

He didn’t answer. I tapped my device again, “Dr. Herbert? Where are you?”

The voice sounded like it was coming through a tunnel, as Dr. Herbert answered my call. “Jana! The Monsters! The Captain’s Deck. One of them attacked a crewmember, and then the rest. I ran.”

“Keep yourself safe, Dr. Herbert. Fight your fears.”

“I’m trying, but seeing the Monster materialize into physical beings was terrifying. On Earth, they were just invisible or black mist, but now...”

“They’re taking the form of people they possess. They’re inhabiting people’s bodies. Don’t let them take over yours,” I said, just as the elevator reached the Engineering floor.

“Oh, no,” Dr. Herbert’s voice called out in terror. “One’s in here with me. Thought I was safe in my medical quarter but... oh no...”

“I’ll get over there now! Where’s Thomas?” I asked.

“No, don’t come. Keep yourself safe. Thomas went to find you. Both of you stay alive. Your baby is the future. Stay alive.” There was an earth-shattering scream before a deathly silence followed.

I knew Dr. Herbert was gone. Who else? Thomas?

EVIE

“Mom,” I said. “Reading your journal and everything you’ve been through with Dad

on Red Genesis just makes me remember how brave you are. I really miss you,” I sighed.

“You’re advancing quickly,” Sally said. “But you don’t have the luxury of time anymore. Hear that?”

I stopped and listened. There was banging. “Where is it coming from?”

“Outside,” Sally said, “The Monsters. But it looks like they are breaking their way in.”

“Is there a way out of here? What should we do?”

“I’m thinking,” Sally said. “But finish the journal. There may be a clue in there on what to do.”

“Okay,” I said, “I’m going to read as fast as I can now...”

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JANA

The door of the elevators opened, and I cautiously looked out into the beeping red lights of the Engineering floor.

No Monsters were in sight, so I stepped out, making my way towards the main controls. I ran as fast as I could to the very spot Thomas and I had our first kiss. The screen was blinking until I touched a few buttons.

“Computer work,” I said. “Turn on diagnostics.” The red beeping stopped, and a screen flashing the codes of its diagnostics program began scrolling.

FUEL WARNING! FUEL WARNING!

A deep voice sounded behind me, “How much fuel do we have left?”

I turned around quickly to look into beautiful green-gold eyes. Thomas’ eyes. “Thomas!” I reached up to kiss him.

“Jana,” he kissed me back. “Thank God, you’re alright.”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“There’s an outbreak. Monsters everywhere.”

“How? And why now?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas shook his head. “I don’t know exactly why now but it could be because we’re so close to New Earth.”

I looked over at the screen. “We barely have enough to make it to New Earth,” I said.

“Can we go try to land now?” Thomas asked. “If we don’t, we may not have any people left to land on New Earth. Our crew is all over the ship, fighting the Monsters. I’ve alerted them to the Monster’s weakness and the way we’ve been fighting them so they’re all over trying to locate the Monsters. But...”

“There are too many, and they’re killing off people so quickly,” I said.

“So far, Jana, you’ve been the only who can truly vanish them. But you’re pregnant, and you’re only one person...”

I made a few calculations and said, “Thomas, we have to do this to save humanity. We have to do this to save the future.”

Thomas’ eyes filled with tears as he looked at me, “Jana, you don’t have to do this. Jana, I need you with me.”

I couldn’t help the tears falling down my cheeks as I said, “You can get to the top speed, which is sustainable for 10 hours, but it would get us to New Earth in a day instead of in a month. But it would be a hard landing, which may cause massive damage to the Red Genesis.”

Thomas nodded. “I understand.”

“Use the highest speed then pull back towards the end for a smoother glide in and to save fuel,” I said.

“I will,” Thomas said. He was holding me close to his chest, kissing my head, “Jana. Jana. You are my life, my love. You and our child are everything to me. I don’t know how I can go on without you...”

I kissed Thomas and said, “Go do your Captain-y duties, Captain Thomas.”

“And Jana...”

“I have a gift,” Jana said. “I have a destiny. Even the Monsters know about it. I’ll be fine. I’ll go kick their butts. But you...you have to get us to New Earth. By all means possible.”

“My brave Jana,” Thomas said. “If our child is half the woman you are, the Monsters better watch out.”

“Yes, they better!” I said. I touched a few more buttons, preparing the ship for a faster speed. “Look, Captain,” I said. “There’s no turning back.”

Thomas and I walked together down the hallway to the elevators. “Ready to kick as many Monster butts before we separate to do our human-saving duties Mrs. Captain Thomas?”

Thomas brought out his staff, and I wrapped my cross necklace around my fists.

Whatever the future would bring, we would fight as hard and as long as we could to have one on New Earth. For humans, our animals on Earth, and our future New Earthling child.

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EVIE

I closed Mom's journal in time for Sally to say, "We must get out of here. They've broken in."

I grabbed Mom's journal, tucking it into my shirt. Then I opened Sally up from a backpack and into a suit, quickly getting inside. Next, I placed my helmet back on.

"How many Monsters, Sally? How many broke in?"

"A swarm."

"Not helping. Quantities precisely please," I said.

"About five to eight," Sally said.

"Can I fight them off?" I asked.

"The odds are slim," Sally said.

"Create a diversion," I said. "In here. Lead them here."

Sally tapped into the system, and the lights began flashing in the room.

"Evie," Mom's voice suddenly said much louder than before. "Instead of leading them here, escape through the engine room. There's a bag of supplies you can pick up from there."

Touch the wall at the bottom of the ship. It will open and let you out. As soon as you're out, Sally will inflate, and you will be able to leap-glide your way back to the Shelter. I'll buy you some time. Go now!"

"Mom!" I cried out. "Thank you, even if you're not really Mom."

"Good-bye Evie. Forgive me for what I have done and for leaving you here on New Earth. Hopefully you will understand why I had to when you are ready."

With that, the hologram of Mom began running to the door. She turned around and said, "Once I get them chasing me, move quickly to the engine room."

The door opened, and Mom's hologram ran out, "Here am I. Come and get me!" She jumped and leaped from our door, down the hallway and down to another floor, moving as fast as a spotlight. Soon she was at the end of the hallway when dark shadows like a black cloud began flurrying after her into the opposite direction of the engine room. The Monsters.

"Quick!" Sally said in my helmet. "They are all chasing her. The coast is clear as they say."

Instead of taking the elevator or the stairs, I leaped over the railings of our floor down the length of the glass elevator falling rapidly. "Sally, inflate!" I commanded.

Before I became a splattered mess on the ground, my suit inflated into a ball, and I landed on the lobby floor where I first entered with a bounce.

"Sally, deflate."

My suit became a flat, lightweight, and skin tight again where I was able to maneuver through the lobby easily.

“Take that staircase over there to get to the engine room,” Sally said. I quickly ran to the staircase hidden behind a wall and climbed down.

A backpack was hanging on a hook near a door. “Mom’s backpack,” I muttered. I grabbed it and put it on my back. “No time to see what’s inside,” I said. “How do I get out of here?”

“Take off your gloves, Evie,” Sally said. “You need to put your bare hands on the wall so it will open to let us out.”

I took off one of my gloves and placed my hand on the wall. Nothing happened.

“Try both hands,” Sally said.

I took off the glove from my other hand and placed it on the wall. Nothing happened.

“Is it this wall?” I asked Sally.

I went to the other wall and placed a hand there.

Then another wall.

“Am I in the right room?” I asked.

“Warning! Warning!” Sally yelled. “They’re now on this floor. The Monsters. They figured out she’s just a hologram. They’re gathering at the front. Coming closer.”

“Where’s the way out?” I said, trying not to panic, but frantically trying to look for a wall.

“Try opening the wall,” Sally said.

I tried using a hand. Then both hands.

“Why isn’t it working?” I asked.

From behind me, I could hear the sound of roaring wind. Loud and hard like the sound of a train rumbling and shaking the ground as it got closer.

“Ahhh,” I cried out. The sound was deafening. I wanted to reach up to my ears to drown the sound out but instead, my hand went straight to the wall in front of me and in a position where my hands had formed a triangle.

I could see their faces. Molten faces with hollowed out eyes in a misty cloud of faces.

It was horrible. The faces...the Monsters.

“Be brave,” I heard both Sally and my mother’s voices said.

“Do not fear,” a gentle voice said from within.

I felt an inner calmness and warmth grow around me.

The faces within the dark cloud froze for a while before backing up.

The wall opened, and before I knew it, I felt a push as I fell to the surface of New Earth right before the wall closed.

“Hurry,” Sally said, “Leap! Move! Before you get swallowed up.”

“Huh,” I said, still unable to shake off what I have seen.

Sally inflated and I felt her take over my suit. “Go!” I felt my legs jumping forward. Another leap.

Then I saw it right in front of my eyes.

The entire ship, as enormous as it was, began sinking down into the sandy dusty surface of New Earth like it was being swallowed up into its belly until nothing was left where it once stood. But it didn't stop there. The weight of the collapsing ground created a vortex that was sinking everything around it.

It was now pulling me into down into that hole.

“Run!” Sally said. “Now!”

I had to use all my force to move, to climb out before I could even crawl and then jump out.

Like molasses, I had to lift my legs up to take another jump. Then another. Then a few more before I was far enough away from the sinkhole.

Sally had inflated the suit back up into the bounciest level, and my boots lifted with a spring-like mechanism. “Whoa, Sally. What have you been keeping secret from me? All this time, my boots had these spring propulsion heels?”

“I didn't know myself,” Sally said. “It was when I tapped into the ship that I also received an update. Jana must have built it into the boots but it was activated when I tapped in.”

“Well, let's try it out!” I said excitedly. I leaped forward and it propelled me higher and further, moving at a faster pace and distance than before. I kept going and going. “This is great!”

Finally, I was in an area that never felt sweeter than anywhere else in the world to me. My home...the Shelter.

My suit deflated, and I opened the latch to the Shelter's opening and climbed down the ladder. At the last rung, I lost my grip and fell, falling to the concrete hard ground where I landed with a thud.

"Ouch!" I groaned as I laid sprawled out on the floor. I felt so heavy, and my legs felt like jelly. "Sally, why do I feel so heavy?"

Silence.

"Sally? Did you hear me?" I asked again. After a beat, I rolled over, despite the pain I felt in my left foot. I got up on my knees and pushed myself up. "Sally? Are you functioning?"

She didn't answer back.

I quickly removed my suit and examined it.

"Sally! No!" I cried out. "No! No! No!"

The computer chip had torn off of Sally. The brain of Sally was missing. And so was all the memories that she held, instructions from my mother, knowledge about Red Genesis.

I looked around. I felt all alone. Sally was gone.

So was the ship, Red Genesis.

"Why? Why? Why?" I wailed. I sat on the floor for a while as I sobbed.

I couldn't find Mom. Nor could I find another person on the ship.

No one. Not even any skeletons.

What had happened to the rest of the passengers on the Red Genesis besides my mother?

Where did they go?

The rooms I found seemed untouched, as though they were waiting for their owners to come back. Did they step out just to abandon what they had in their rooms?

Mom's journal ended with her preparing to fight against the Monsters. I know Mom made it alive and well off the Red Genesis so she can give birth to me. She ended up building the Shelter and then raising me in there with her.

But there were only the two of us. Even Thomas wasn't there.

What happened to the rest of the crew and passengers?

Was I the only living being on New Earth and of Old Earth in the entire universe?

I was exhausted and hungry. I wanted to sleep, but I needed to find out more.

But the ship sank, disappeared into the depth of New Earth. Fortunately, it seemed that Mom had already left the ship long before I found it. But she had left me some clues.

My eyes fell on the backpack I found from the engine room from the ship. Mother's hologram told me to get it and bring it back home.

I went to it and opened it.

Inside were seeds from all kinds of plants, vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers. Freeze-dried snacks, candies, meats, and ice cream. Some tools and a little silver packet.

I couldn't help tearing into the candy and the ice cream before I ate some fruit pieces. When I felt better and stronger, I opened the silver packet.

Tiny microchips fell into my hands.

My eyes lit up. "Microchips!" I yelled. "I can build anything now!"

Then I saw the note inside the silver packet.

Evie, I knew you would make it to this part. I packed what was left from the ship into this backpack from the pantry I went looking for. I did find food, but there was so much more. We first saw signs, and that's when left the Shelter and went looking for people. They weren't on the Red Genesis, at least that ship. Perhaps the other 2 ships. But, I'll keep looking for them until I find them. It is my mission as the surviving leader from the Red Genesis settlement. You must stay put and maintain the Shelter for those people I am bringing back. I am counting on you to keep the Shelter going. The database of humankind is kept there, and now that you have the microchips, we can rebuild New Earth as it once was. I love you, Evie.

Mom.

I felt better knowing Mom had discovered there were more people alive. Humanity has a chance. I also know now how much more capable she was than anyone else. I witnessed how the love and will of a mother can drive Mom to do anything to make her way back to me. Witnessing everything Mom did with the Red Genesis and this Shelter gave me confidence that she would succeed.

Most importantly, having faced and fought the Monsters, then being saved, despite facing them head on, gave me hope that we humans can overcome the Monsters. Every footage and report I've seen of the Monsters from Vintage Earth's archives showed that whenever a human encountered a Monster, the human perishes.

But reading Mom's Journal proved otherwise. We can fight the Monsters. She did. So did Dad. And I did. I should have perished, if I believed the news that were reported back from Vintage Earth. But I lived and was saved. I was saved by a higher power than humans. God. That gentle but strong voice that intervened right when the Monsters reached me.

Mom said to stay put and wait for her while maintaining the Shelter. She's given me enough seeds for me to grow in our Shelter's gardens to last for years, and packets of freeze-dried food that would last up to 25 years. I was set.

As I got up to walk over to the Control Center of the Shelter, I felt a breeze flash by me before a heavy blow to the back of my head. My eyes rolled back as I felled to the ground, spilling everything in my backpack and Mom's journal.

My eyes went blurry before everything went black.

How long was I in this position? How long was I sleeping on the ground?

I looked around me. Everything was in place as it should be. Nothing was amiss. But a suit was missing, the latch cover to the opening of the Shelter was opened, and there was one tiny microchip on the ground.

Where did that chip come from? As long as I inventoried everything in the Shelter, there was no microchip which was incredibly precious.

And the latch door. How did that get opened? The last time I went outside was when I saw Mom leave the Shelter to go look for missing people after receiving a signal. That was a month ago?

"Mom?" I called out. "Mom?" Did she return?

Did something happen when I fell asleep?

Somehow, I couldn't remember. I couldn't remember going outside of the shelter.

I reached up to climb up the ladder to close the latch door, only to feel an intense pain in my shoulder. I walked over to the nearest mirror and looked behind me. There was a large bruise from my neck to the back of my shoulder. I ached all over my body as well. What happened?

Did something happen here? Was there something in here that went missing? I couldn't remember. But I knew something was off. Mom wasn't back. Where did she go?

As I put healing cream on my back, I noticed a movement at the corner of my eye.

God help us. I am not alone in here.