

Newearth

Chapter 1: The Spaceship

May 13th, 3020

What Aria wanted more than anything in the world was a burger. A big, fat, juicy burger with extra pickles and crispy French fries on the side. And a huge slice of cheesecake covered in caramel. A chocolate milkshake would be nice too. Or some cotton candy ice cream. Aria closed her eyes, and tried to imagine the different tastes on her tongue. She was sick of eating the gross, mushy goop the spaceship's crew served for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

"You can have all the burgers and cheesecake you want when we get to Newearth," Aria's father would say whenever Aria grumbled about her meals.

But what if they didn't have burgers on Newearth? What if Aria never got to taste chocolate ever again?

I want to go home, Aria thought. The thrill of floating around on a spaceship had worn off after a few days of being on board. At first, zooming through the Milky Way Galaxy was exciting. But now, after eleven months of being stuck in endless darkness, Aria wanted to get out. Although they were traveling faster than the speed of light, they had entered the Andromeda Galaxy only a couple of weeks ago. "We will be reaching our destination in approximately ninety days", the space captain had announced. Aria couldn't wait for her feet to touch solid ground. Zero gravity was not fun. Only, she didn't want to land on Newearth, she wanted to go back to Earth. And that would never happen. Aria tried to fight the tears off. She hated crying on the ship. Her tears would fall out of her eyes and then float away, taunting her from across the room.

She clutched the little heart hanging from the locket around her neck and closed her eyes. Aria remembered how difficult it was seeing her grandmother for the last time at the space station. Her grandmother had wiped away her tears and handed her a small golden locket.

“My picture is inside,” she had said. “You must be strong Aria. Remember that no matter what, you will be here, in my heart, and I will always be in yours.”

As she ran her fingers around the smooth metal of the locket, she pictured her grandmother’s warm smile. She couldn’t fight back the tears anymore.

Aria’s father had sold everything he owned to pay for the journey to Newearth, but in the end they still only had enough for two tickets. Aria’s grandmother wouldn’t be able to join them. Her grandmother insisted that she didn’t want to go. “This is my home, leave me be. I was born here and I will die here,” she had said. Her grandmother and father had fought over the move day and night. Aria’s father didn’t want to leave his mother behind. Aria didn’t mean to listen in on their conversations, but it was difficult to drown out their loud voices.

“Mother, you cannot stay here. It’s not safe anymore. They’re saying that, in a few years, no one will be able to live on Earth at all. There aren’t enough natural resources to sustain the planet anymore. Please, let me sell the house,” Aria’s father argued.

“I am not going anywhere, dear. There’s no way I am selling my house to go running off into space. If the planet explodes, then it will explode with me on it,” her grandmother replied.

“It’s not going to explode, but we’re going to run out of food. Haven’t you been listening to the news Mother? Ever since the bees went extinct, entire species of plants have been dying. Synthetic plantanariums and AndroBees simply cannot keep up. And pretty soon, we’ll have to wear those awful anti-pollution masks every day, not just on bad air days. Mother, the trees are dying. How will we breathe?” Her father pleaded.

“I’m not going Adam,” her grandmother said.

“Please Mother, we cannot leave you here.”

“Then stay.”

“I can’t. I need to give Aria a better future.”

Even when Aria showed her grandmother the commercials and advertisements she’d found about Newearth, her grandmother had refused to budge.

“Look, grandma, they have lots of pretty flowers on Newearth, and you love flowers, don’t you Grandma? Remember before flowers went extinct, you said Grandpa used to buy you bunches of them all the time? Wouldn’t you like to smell roses again? We could plant as many as you want!” Aria exclaimed.

As images of happy, smiling families flashed on the screen, an enthusiastic voice said, “Make the right move! Newearth offers you and your family a better chance to live a greener life, a cleaner life. Join the millions who now call Newearth their home. Apply for a Space Travel Visa at your nearest immigration office today!”

“I’m sorry, my child, but this is my home. I’m not leaving it,” her grandmother said, pressing the off button on the screen.

Aria thought about all the other people on Earth that she would never see again. There was her best friend Ian. His jokes had always made her burst into fits of laughter. When she’d asked him why he couldn’t move to Newearth too, Ian had explained that his family couldn’t afford the spaceship tickets. “You’re so lucky, Aria,” he had said. “Think of all the cool new things you’ll see and all the awesome aliens you’ll meet. I heard that they have clean oceans you can actually swim in! Imagine that Aria, being able to swim in an ocean! I also heard that they

have lots of different kinds of dogs there. Real, actual dogs. Wouldn't you love to have a real dog as a pet?" Ian had said. Aria had smiled, nodding her head.

She loved Kobi, her AndroDog, but for as long as she remembered, Aria had wanted a pet dog like the ones in her history textbooks. She enjoyed reading about her favorite animals in school, but seeing them roam freely in nature or playing with them would be a dream come true. Most of the animals on Earth had become extinct long before Aria was born. It made her sad that she would not get to see any of these fascinating creatures. She tried to imagine a time when the Earth was full of animals like polar bears, lions, horses, cheetahs, elephants, kangaroos, pandas, squirrels, and birds. The few animals that were left were locked up inside massive glass domes in zoos around the world. On her first trip to the zoo, Aria had spotted a small brown dog sniffing the ground near a bush. She squealed in excitement. "Mom, mom, look!" she said, pointing her finger at the dog. It had rough, light brown fur with a black spot on its snout. Aria crouched down. She wanted to get as close to it as she could. She felt like a space explorer discovering a new planet. *Beep beep*. She pressed an imaginary button on her imaginary data device. "To base. I see a weird creature ahead." Aria pressed her nose up against the glass. She wanted to touch the dog. Would it feel soft? Her AndroDog was made of hard metal and wires, and didn't feel soft at all. Ever since that day at the zoo, Aria had dreamed of having a pet dog. She hoped Ian was right. She hoped that they had real dogs on Newearth, and if they did, the first thing she was going to do when they arrived was ask her father to buy her one.

Chapter 2: Arrival On Newearth

August 15th, 3020

The first thing at Aria noticed when they stepped out of the space station was that it was bright outside. Very bright. She looked up at the sky. On Earth, the sky was always grey because of all the pollution, but here, it was an intense blue. And what's that? There were white, "V" shaped streaks soaring in the air. With a jolt of excitement, Aria realized that the streaks were a type of bird. They had done a unit on birds in class once. These white birds were often used as a symbol of peace. She racked her brain, trying to remember what the birds were called. *Were they owls? No, owls are those large eyed birds that only came out at night. Doves! That's what they're called.* Aria felt proud of herself for remembering. She smiled.

Instead of one massive sun shining in the sky, there were two smaller suns. One was a dazzling pink, and the other was a brilliant yellow. Aria looked away from the suns. They hurt her eyes. She wondered if there were two moons as well.

She took a deep breath. The air felt lighter and clearer than the air on Earth. It also tasted a bit salty.

Her father had told her to wait on a bench while he loaded their bags into the cab, but she didn't want to wait. She wanted to run across the parking lot and throw herself on to the green, luscious grass that surrounded the space station. Aria couldn't believe her eyes. She had never seen such green grass before. And the trees. They were massive! Aria had learned about the different kinds of trees at school. Their teacher had shown them pictures of all the ones that had gone extinct. Aria never imagined that she would be able to see oak and elm trees in real life. There was something brown crawling up one of the oak trees. Aria squinted her eyes to get a better look. The thing had a slender body and a big bushy tail. *It's a squirrel. It's a squirrel!* *Ahh!* Aria couldn't contain her excitement. Ian was right. Newearth was full of amazing new

things for her to discover. Aria thought again about her wish for a pet dog. *If they have squirrels on this planet, then they must have dogs.*

Aria continued to observe her surroundings with awe. To the left of the bench, there were several large, square-shaped containers arranged in a neat row. Aria gasped when she saw what was inside them.

Red, white, pink, and yellow roses were sticking out of the dirt in the containers. Aria stretched out her fingers to touch the silky petals of a yellow rose. They were smoother than she expected. She ran her fingers across a red rose. *If only I could show these to grandma,* she thought sadly. Aria decided that she would take one of the roses to show her father. As she tugged at the stem, she felt something crawl up her arm. A tiny black thing with eight, little legs was happily making its way up Aria's sleeve. Aria shrieked, and dropped the rose on to the ground. She shook the thing out of her sleeve. Her body felt itchy all over. In her frenzy over the little insect, Aria had somehow managed to prick her finger on a thorn. "Ow!" The gash in her finger stung. Aria stared at the blood seeping out of her finger. The fake roses in her grandmother's living room had never hurt her or had creepy things crawl out of them. Aria wasn't sure if she liked real roses that much after all. Why was her father taking so long? Aria looked away from her finger to check on her father, and saw three large, orange eyes staring at her. She was too surprised to scream.

A strange, blue creature had materialized out of nowhere, and was standing inches away from her. The hairy creature's head was covered in long, sharp spikes. Aria suddenly felt scared.

"Yani herpa darpa blip si?" The creature said in a low, squeaky voice. Aria did not understand a single word. Clearly, the creature wasn't speaking English. She tried not to gasp in horror at the size of the creature's teeth. Nobody had told her there would be monsters on

Newearth. The aliens in the advertisements did not look like this. They had looked human, only much tinier and more colorful. And they had all spoken English. What was this weird language the creature was speaking?

When Aria didn't reply, the creature repeated its strange sentence in a much louder voice. Aria shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She felt like her heart was stuck in her throat. She could barely speak. "Um,...err.. I..I ...uh...can't understand what you're saying."

The creature gave Aria a confused look. "Shoja zu zu! Ick ack. Tee ma era li ghal," the creature said, picking up the broken rose and pointing at Aria's finger. It threw the rose back into the pot. Gesturing at Aria again, the creature shook its head angrily and said, "Ni, zu tee ma ick ackliera!"

When Aria didn't react, the creature gave her one final scowl and stomped off.

All of Aria's excitement over the blue sky, the grass, the trees, the squirrel, and the roses had melted away. With a sick feeling in her stomach, Aria had the sinking realization that she would be stuck on this planet with these creepy-looking creatures forever. She gripped her grandmother's locket as tightly as she could.

Aria ran to where her father was standing and threw herself into his arms. "I want to go home, Daddy," she cried. She had not called her father 'daddy' in years.

"I know, sweetheart. I know. But this is our home now".

Chapter 3: A New Home

September 3rd, 3020

Aria was both nervous and excited. She was on her way to her new school. She would be starting fifth grade on Newearth, and she didn't know what to expect. As she stared out of the school bus window at all the passing scenery, Aria thought about all the things that had happened since they moved to Newearth.

On their third day there, Aria and her father had experienced their first Newearthian thunderstorm. It had unexpectedly started raining on their walk home from the supermarket, and Aria had jumped in fright at the sound of thunder. Back on Earth, everyone had to wear protective bodysuits whenever it rained. Rain had become so acidic over the years that it could burn through unprotected skin. She ran to duck for cover but her father had ushered her back. "It's fine, sweetheart," he said, "the rain here is safe." Aria looked around, and sure enough, people were going about their business as usual. The rain did not seem to bother them one bit. With some hesitation, Aria stepped out from beneath the canopy she had run under, and welcomed the rain. The water pouring on her head felt cool and refreshing. It was like taking a shower, only better. She danced around, leaping from one puddle to the next. Unlike the rain on Earth, which smelled like rotten eggs, Newearthian rain smelled like sea salt and damp wood.

For the most part, Aria and father hadn't ventured too far from the immigrant settlement the Newearthian government had stationed them in. That was mainly because they had no money. It would be some time before her father would be allowed to apply for a job. There was a lot of paperwork to sort through. "In the meantime," her father had said, "We must live off of the generous donations the Newearthians have given us." Yet, despite their lack of money, Aria's father still tried to make sure Aria was as comfortable as possible in her new home.

Two weeks after their arrival, her father surprised her by taking her to something called an animal shelter. “Is it like a zoo” Aria asked. “Because I hate zoos. The animals always look so sad.”

“No, honey, it’s a place where animals wait to be adopted. We are going to get you a pet,” her father said, smiling.

Aria couldn’t contain her excitement once they entered the shelter. She felt as though her heart was going to erupt out of her chest. She ran from kennel to kennel, curiously examining all the cute, furry creatures. The nice lady working there asked Aria if she would like to play with one of the dogs.

“Yes! Yes!” Aria cried, “I want to play with that one!” Aria exclaimed, pointing at a small chocolate-coloured dog with large, honey-brown eyes. When the lady placed the dog in Aria’s waiting arms, Aria nearly burst into tears of joy. The dog licked her face and she began to giggle. She felt a rush of affection wash over her. This was the dog of her dreams. She would name it Cocoa.

Aria smiled as she thought about Cocoa. She couldn’t wait to get back home from school and play with her dog. *I wonder if any of the other kids have dogs*, she thought. The school bus had stopped to let on more students. Two alien kids got on, as well as a pink-haired human girl. To Aria’s horror, one of those three-eyed creatures was also entering the bus.

The pink-haired girl plunked herself next to Aria.

“Are you new here?” The girl said cheerfully. “What’s your name? I’m Kali”.

“Yeah, my father and I just moved her from Earth, I’m Aria.” Aria said.

“Oh you’re going to love it here...just wait until I introduce you to...” The girl began to chat, telling Aria about the school and her friends, but Aria wasn’t listening. She was staring at

the three-eyed creature suspiciously. Its right and left eyes were bright blue, while its middle eye was a dark purple. Unlike the orange-eyed creature who has spoken to her at the space station, this one was shorter, and rounder. It had much smaller spikes on its head. There were bright red bows dangling from each of the spikes. It sat down next to a human boy. The boy didn't seem to be concerned by the fact that a hairy thing with three eyes was sitting next to him. The thing said something to the boy and the boy laughed.

Why isn't he scared? Aria wondered. Are those things really going to be with us at school? The thing was wearing the same black and red uniform they all were. Aria knew eavesdropping wasn't polite, but she couldn't help listening in on their conversation. She could only catch snippets of what they were saying. To her surprise, the creature could speak English. "Do you want to see my new puppy?" the creature was saying. The boy nodded. Aria's eyes grew wide with surprise. *The creature has a puppy? Creepy monsters wouldn't have a puppy,* Aria thought. She watched as the creature took out some kind of electronic device from its backpack and passed it to the boy. Aria leaned forward in her seat, trying to get a better look at the device in the boy's hand. It was too far away for her to see properly. The boy and the thing were now looking at her. The boy pointed in her direction. Aria slouched back down in her seat. How embarrassing. They had seen her staring.

Aria turned her attention to Kali who was still chattering on. "Kali, what is...uh...that thing over there?" Aria asked in a low voice. She didn't want the boy or the creature to hear.

Kali gave her a confused look. "What thing?"

"That blue thing with three eyes?"

“Oh, you mean Eiona. She’s not a *thing*. She’s a Trioog. They’re very friendly aliens from the planet Trioogota. Eiona is super sweet and funny. Don’t you just love her spikey hair? It’s so beautiful.” Kali said.

Aria didn’t reply. She felt ashamed of herself for misjudging Eiona. For the rest of the ride, she continued to sneak peeks at Eiona and the boy. When they got off the bus, Aria would introduce herself to Eiona. And maybe, if she could sum the courage, she would ask Eiona to bring her new puppy over to play with Cocoa. *That would be nice*, she thought. Aria no longer felt nervous about attending her new school. There was nothing to be afraid of. Everything was going to be okay.