

Visionary from the Stars

By Virginia Lori Jennings



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First printing

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my family, my Mom and my sisters. Also, namely my Dad with whom I have spent countless hours talking over the funny little facts of space theory, physics, and intelligent life. When all else fails they are my inspiration, the ones who guide me back along the path that God has set for me.

Thank you for putting up with me when I “hid” up in my room for hours working on my writing, for helping me with deadlines and for keeping my spirits high. I want to thank you all for being there for me, and especially for hearing me out when I had story problems I wanted to talk out.

Sincerely,
Gina

Acknowledgements

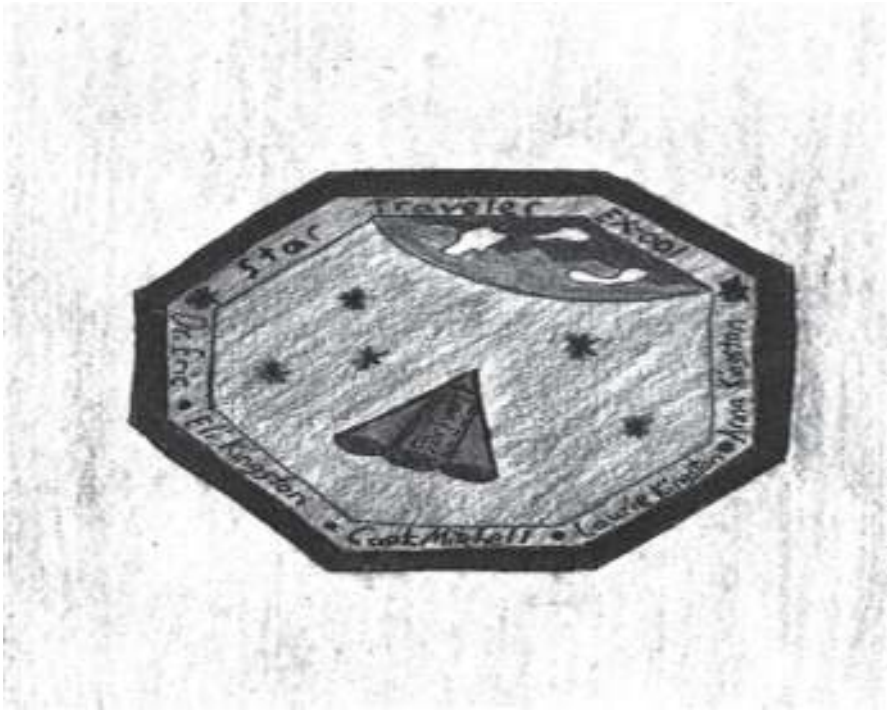
I would also like to take a quick second to acknowledge all of the writers that I have met in the past few years (you know who you are). I wish to encourage you in your own writing. It's not impossible to reach the stars...you just have to find the right ship to get you there! Whatever you do, keep up your writing; who knows where it will take you!

Also to all of my younger fans...thank you for your support. In return I'd like to offer some advice; no matter how old you get, continue reading. Reading opens windows to worlds we can only imagine, and lets us go places we would otherwise never be able to go.

Furthermore, I'd like to thank my local librarians for their support and continued assistance as I worked to get both of my books published.

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Prologue

Jean walked among the rows of instrument consoles installed in the research ship, her home. Lightly passing her hand over the glittering lights, she realized that her ship was more home to her than Planet Udoran ever had been. A few years ago EASA (Earth's Aeronautics and Space Administration) sent her out into Udoran's surrounding stellar system in this one-manned research ship. Since then, she realized, she had become more alienated from the very planet she had once called home. As a research scientist she had been sent to observe and compare the various aspects constantly changing on the many diverse planets in the system. The goal was to learn more about Udoran itself. However as each day went by she found herself longing not for the customary shore leave, but instead to travel farther away from Udoran and discover what else lay beyond the reaches of the gravitational pull from the system's star.

These past few years she'd spent most of her time on these many research hermitages; keeping her far away from civilization. It was on these research hermitages that Jean had become, or perhaps she always had been, far less "down to Earth," or actually Udoran for that matter, than her younger brother. She was never aware of the simple changes that occurred on her home planet of Udoran while she was away.

For a while Jean had accepted the requirement for her to be escorted while on planet. Sometimes she had come home to find that a familiar landmark street was now home to a building site for a high rise office complex. One time she also found that it was no longer appropriate to shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. "So and So" from down the street because of their change in social status. The company agent would be

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responsible for helping her acclimate herself once more to any changes had occurred within the colonies while she had been away. Soon though, the necessity of an escort became quite irritating and she began to find fewer and fewer reasons to return to the planet she had once labeled as her home.

Yes as a child, Udoran had been her home. Jean remembered parties she and her parents used to attend. Nighttime parties under glittering clear domes that allowed the stars to be seen from the dance floor. Parties where anyone who was anyone in Udoran's business world, was bound to be present. But they didn't last long. . . Jean bit her upper lip as she remembered the fateful day that would change her and her brother's life forever.

Jean had been fourteen for eight months, ten days, thirteen hours, as her computer had reminded her when waking her up this morning. (*She had to remember to shut that off.*) Her brother, Peter McClain, had just turned thirteen a month earlier; they were teenagers. Neither of them expected that their future could be changed so drastically with the announcement of one horrible piece of news. This news would suddenly interrupt Peter's favorite show.

Peter groaned as his favorite afternoon show was interrupted by an emotionless newscaster. . . however his eyes suddenly would not leave the screen as the story was displayed before him. . . .

"We are sorry to report that the owners of this word channel, Mr. Girt and Mrs. Donna McClain, have been found dead." The newscaster continued, "Mr. and Mrs. McClain were out on a safari trip in the Pekonet Desert when their peaceful afternoon went horribly wrong. Authorities in the area report that the McClains have been killed by an explosion. After the initial investigation, authorities claim that the explosion was from some sort of vehicle that landed in the area. The unknown vehicle exploded right after it touched the ground, devastating a vast area of land."

"Ships don't just explode like that after landing!" Peter had shouted at no one, as the reporter, emotionlessly, went on to other topics.

Becky, Jean's best friend from school, was over doing homework with Jean in the next room when they heard Peter shout.

After ashen-faced Peter ran in and told his sister what he had just seen, Jean rushed to their father's computer to look up the incident on the

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word-net. Sure enough, everything was as Peter had told her...their parents were dead.

Jean sat back into the cushioned computer chair feeling dazed and frightened. Becky, who had read the article over her shoulder, laid a comforting hand on Jean's arm.

"Everything will be okay," Becky had said. "You mustn't lose faith."

"Faith in what!" Peter replied stormily as he entered the room and sat on a nearby bench.

"Faith in God," she replied calmly.

"What kind of God would do this?" Peter mumbled.

"To this day we have never figured out what caused that ship to explode in the Pekonet Desert," Jean told the ship's instruments sitting in front of her.

Behind her, an instrument panel responded to her statement with a loud warning alarm that brought Jean back to the present. She spun around to see what was wrong and found that she was receiving a message from an unknown source. She tapped a button to hear the call.

"We are the Platonians. We heard your statement a moment ago...That wasn't a ship that exploded in the Pekonet Desert. It was a missile."

Jean stared incredulously at her computer.

"From your silence we assume that you do not believe us...If you allow us to come aboard your ship, we will explain."

Forgetting about the strange communiqué for a moment, Jean realized in awe that a comet was coming slowly into her view. She spared a few seconds to peel her eyes away from the viewscreen in order to make sure that her instruments were recording the comet's majestic passing. Sure enough, they were all doing what they were supposed to do. Crediting the strange communiqué to her bored imagination, Jean welcomed the chance to observe the visiting comet.

Something wasn't right though. Jean could feel that something wasn't right. Like the feeling that you get when you are looking for a certain road to go down and you feel as though you've gone too far—the comet didn't look like the common comma-shaped comet. Its main body was round

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like most others yes, but it had five spire-like objects extruding from its sides, which all then bent to meet together at the back through which the tail was produced.

Jean jumped suddenly as one of the computers around her sent out an alarm. She knew instinctively, by the tone of the alarm, which particular computer panel was calling for her attention. She turned to her left, ran around the center circle of computer banks, and rounded on the culprit computer. Jean frowned as she realized what the huge load of information scrolling down the blue glowing screen was trying to tell her. She looked, horrified yet also mystified, towards the viewscreen across the room.

Slowly the comet's speed dropped down to her own ship's relative speed. The comet turned slowly towards her ship and began its approach. Confused, Jean looked back and forth at the nearest set of computer terminals. One terminal screamed out a proximity alarm. Six others sent out computerized voice messages that were supposed to alert Jean to the comet's possible time to impact, probable future course and destination of the comet, along with various choices of evasive actions to choose from.

Instead, Jean stood stunned, watching the viewscreen. When the comet traveled past the screen's sights she turned on the peripheral cameras with a single voice command. Amazingly, the comet then came to a relative stop. As the comet brushed gently against the ship causing a few more computers to squeal in alarm, Jean realized that it was trying to dock with her ship!

"Impossible!" she exclaimed aloud to the viewscreen.

Jean ran around the computerized observation deck shutting down the various alarms and manually issued the commands telling the computer to cease all present activities. This brought the room into silence except for the tiny beeps and chirps that told Jean that all her instructions were being followed. She looked back towards the viewscreen where the comet still presided.

Desiring a better view, Jean decided to head down to the window beside the airlock. She crossed the room and stepped into an empty rectangular cavity in the wall. A panel slid down in front of her sealing away the observation deck. Slowly the small closet-like room lost its gravity. Jean floated from the floor and just as her white soft-soled shoes

left the floor, the floor itself slid away to reveal a silver ladder that came to a stop on the floor now further beneath her.

Jean tucked her legs under her body, flipped over downwards, and proceeded to pull herself down the ladder. Once she reached the floor, she snapped her shoes into their magnetic bottoms. She walked past the doors and ladders along the wall to her right, all which led to other areas on her ship, and made her way over to the airlock. Suddenly the weightlessness disappeared as the ship's living quarters began to have its own gravity.

"Hey! What!?" Jean exclaimed, as her knees gave out from underneath her and her body crumpled to the floor from the sudden surprise in gravity.

She carefully stood up and testing the gravity, she proceeded to walk to the controls beside the airlock door. Jean paused before the airlock as she saw that it was already pressurized. She headed to the window beside the airlock door and was amazed to find a docking ramp had extended from the now tailless comet and had sealed itself around her ship's hatch.

Jean watched with a mixture of nerves, excitement, and horror as the airlock slowly cycled open. Three tall and wiry forms sporting long, thick, green tails, stepped through her ship's airlock as the door swung inward.

"We are the Platonians," the first one replied.

Jean stared wide-eyed at the bipedal, green-skinned aliens who had just come onto her ship. She nodded in astonishment.

"Yyy...You said that the explosion that killed my parents was a missile?" Jean asked stunned.

"Yes," a second Platonian replied, nodding his knobby head and flicking a long, thick, green tail.

"Where did the missile come from then?" Jean asked. *I can't believe that I am speaking to aliens!*

"That is why we are here..." the third Platonian replied. "You see, there is another species that keeps leading groups of humans into places where this species then implements plans that ensure the humans will ultimately fall prey to any number of things—attacks, illnesses, you name it.

"They do this by luring the humans into searching for a cylinder alien relic that happens to be hidden in various dangerous places. Like on an

inhospitable and dangerous planet, or in a stellar system about to go nova.”

“Many of your species has been harmed...and we want to stop them.” The second Platonian spread his arms out wide to illustrate as he spoke up.

“You see, the aliens had placed one of those relics on Udoran. When your parents got too close...well they...blew them up, if you don’t mind my borrowing a nondescript phrase from your language,” the first Platonian replied, as he placed a firm hand on Jean’s shoulder.

Even though the feeling of the Platonian’s touch repulsed her somehow...Jean still remembered the pain and closed her eyes as she relived the pictures from the news broadcast, which had delivered the news of her parents’ death so long ago.

“Can I help stop them from doing this again?” Jean asked.

“We need someone who knows your kind...someone who might be able to help us deter your people from trying to find these relic baits.”

“I’ll do everything I can,” Jean replied, lifting her face to look into the eyes of the Platonian nearest to her.

She looked away quickly though. For some strange reason she found herself trying to avoid looking at these creatures directly. Jean was unsure why, but every time she looked at these Platonians she began to feel a chill travel up her spine.

“Good then come aboard our ship and we will show you our first urgent problem,” the second, shortest Platonian, replied as they led her into their alien vessel.

They had just stepped through the hatch into their own ship, however, when they stopped. They pointed at a viewscreen in front of them on the wall of the small room.

“That is Jupiter Station!” Jean exclaimed, recognizing the technological wonder that Earth’s engineers had recently finished.

She watched quietly as it sat spinning lazily in Jupiter’s orbit.

“There is another of those alien relic things on one of this planet’s moons. If the station becomes fully operational, the humans will undoubtedly find the relic and fall into the alien trap.

“Do you have any suggestions?” the Platonian standing beside her asked.

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“Well...I really don't think we'll have to worry about it much; it could be a while before it is fully staffed. Sometimes stations like this one end up decommissioned because they don't pass their safety inspections. A station could be deemed too dangerous to live in because some bad virus may be found lurking in the walls or the design isn't safe.” Jean peeled her eyes away from the viewscreen on which Jupiter and the station delicately danced and looked hesitantly back toward her ship's airlock.

“One time a plant from one of the planets we were trying to put a station on had gotten inside the station and took it over...It was a vicious plant that attacked anything that came close. That station had to be abandoned,” Jean stated, thinking out loud.

“Thank you,” the third Platonian replied, cutting her off.

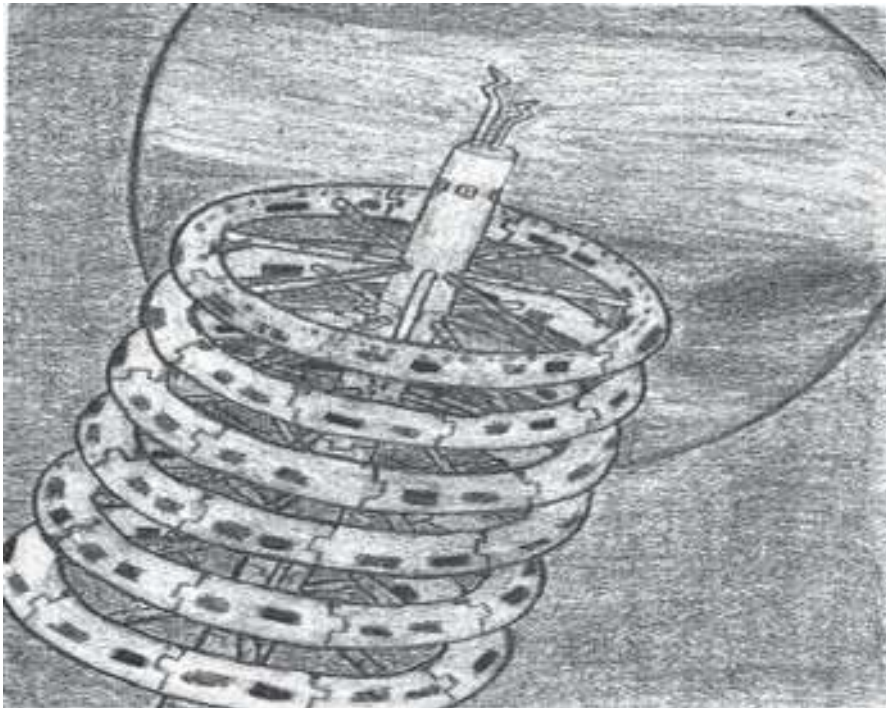
“You shall be a great help to us...if you would consent to joining us,” the second stated.

“Definitely—no one else should be hurt from this alien species' twisted plans,” Jean replied, surprised that her musings had proven helpful to these Platonians.

“Good. Then we have a long trip ahead of us. In order to be able to stop these aliens from spreading their dangerous plans we will have to take you back to our own planet...there we will be able to use all of our resources to stop these beings.”

Jean went back to her own ship which was now operating again in weightlessness. She couldn't help but think over everything she had just found out. The Platonians stayed latched to Jean's ship, towing it along as the two ships flew off toward Platonia...the home of the Platonians. Unfortunately, Jean paid little mind to the little voice inside her head that, for some unknown reason disliked the Platonians.

Jean found herself hoping to find whoever it was that killed her parents. As she zipped her floating self into her sleeping bag attached to the wall in her room she couldn't help but think about what she would do to stop the beings that were harming her fellow humans. Then at last, shaking her head to rid her mind's eye of the eerie sharp-toothed grin of the Platonians, she floated into an uneasy sleep.



CHAPTER 1

Crisis at Jupiter Station

A young girl named Laurie Kingston tossed and turned as she desperately tried to go back to sleep, but she couldn't...Something big had happened, something that made Laurie know that her life would now never be the same. It had all started a little over a week ago...a month after her ninth birthday. Just as things always do, everything started out normal....

Laurie's parents were employees of EASA, Earth's Aeronautics and Space Administration. Her family had been transferred to new assignments at Tranquility lunar colony located in the "Mare Tranquillitatis" on the moon where they have been residents for about six months now. Her mother, Doctor Anna Kingston, had recently been working with a team of other scientists and doctors. They were researching how to counter the effects of the limited lunar gravity on the human body.

Laurie's father, Eli Kingston, had been assigned to a group who was working on experimenting with the current lunar-based agriculture. Their studies revolved around the effort to increase the harvest potential of the lunar colonies' current crops. Because her parents' work took them away from their Tranquility City apartment, Laurie spent her time tagging along with either one of them as she worked on her daily complement of schoolwork and other various projects via her palmtop computer.

This particular computer was very unlike any other design that had been created by humanity. Traditionally called MTD's, this small device was only distributed to top-ranking EASA employees who were sent out

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past Earth's atmosphere. Laurie was issued hers by the administration though, to demonstrate their gratitude for her ongoing contributions to their engineering projects.

As Laurie had begun to follow her parents to work, a few of her parents' fellow coworkers began to discover that Laurie had an amazing quality; whenever she was around any type of electronics or machine—she loved to tinker. If it happened to be broke, Laurie would be found puzzling over the particular device's many working parts until suddenly it was discovered that she had fixed the problem. Laurie had been given the privilege of working alongside the EASA technicians in the labs on the lunar base as they worked on various types of machines and electronic devices.

As the Kingston family went about their work with the space agency they managed to meet many friends and fellow EASA employees. Two such friends were Captain Frank Mitchell, and Dr. Eric. History books might say they were the ones who started everything, and all with a simple question....

“What are you all planning to do over vacation?” Captain Mitchell asked, calling to Mr. Kingston over the din of the crowd.

Captain Mitchell and Dr. Eric struggled to catch up with him as Mr. Kingston headed down the halls that led to apartment complex A/42.

“We had thought about going camping out on the lunar surface...all that we have yet to decide is where we will go,” Eli replied, stopping to allow Captain Mitchell and Dr. Eric to catch up as the two friends wove their way through the throngs of people, all who were traveling back and forth from their various destinations.

“Actually,” Mr. Kingston said; he suddenly remembered something he should have thought of earlier, “we also wanted to invite both of you to come along...a trip is more fun with friends,” he continued with a laugh.

“Well, I'm not doing anything...how about you, Dr. Eric?” Captain Mitchell asked, turning excitedly to the scientist.

“I currently have nothing scheduled, Captain Mitchell...a camping excursion would give me the chance to do some exploring on the lunar surface.”

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“I guess I won’t even suggest trying to find some time to relax,” Mr. Kingston replied with a smile, “so are you two coming or not?”

“Yes,” Captain Mitchell and Dr. Eric replied almost in unison.

“As a matter of fact I know a place that would provide the perfect camping spot. It even comes with its own story!” Captain Mitchell replied mischievously.

Farther out in space, past Mars and the asteroid belt, Sarah Gatores walked down the long curving hallway of the nearly empty space station that orbited the planet Jupiter. Her younger brother and sister followed closely behind her as they toured the new, recently completed station. Jack Gatores, their father, was assigned by Earth’s EASA to captain this post. Mr. Gatores had insisted on having a few days to “get acquainted” with the systems of the new station before EASA’s Space Command Central sent along any crew.

For the first time in what had seemed like years—Sarah, her brother, and their little sister were allowed to come with their father to his new post. Mr. Gatores was down in the lower decks checking the command room. Sarah took her sister and brother up to explore through the various suites that were found on the upper levels of the station.

“This place is huge!” Sarah’s brother Jed exclaimed as they rose through the center of the station in an elevator.

“Dad says that ‘It was built to accommidete over 10,000 people,’” six-year-old Alice replied, mimicking her father’s deep voice. “What does ‘accomidete’ mean?”

“Actually it is ‘accommodate,’ Alice...it means that the station can ‘hold without crowding’ over 10,000 people,” Sarah replied, looking down at her younger sister.

“Is that a lot?” little Alice asked, craning her head to look up at her brother Jed.

“Yeah...it’s a lot,” Jed replied absently.

The elevator stopped and the twin doors opened. The three siblings stepped out into the arched hallway that was lined with a flat blue carpet.

“Everyone knows that you’re not happy about leaving our home on Earth, Jed, but do you have to act miserable now that we’re already here?”

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Sarah asked her ten-year-old brother. “You should try to get used to it... This is Dad’s post now; we will probably be living here for quite some time.”

“You’re only one year older than I am... Just because Mom died, that doesn’t make you the boss,” Jed replied as he stopped walking and crossed his arms.

Sarah stopped as well and turned reluctantly to look at her brother behind her.

“I’m not saying that I’m the boss...,” she stated sadly.

“Then quit acting like it!” Jed replied crossly.

Little Alice stood between her brother and sister looking confusedly back and forth between them.

Jed frowned and shook his head before he stomped past his sisters. Sarah closed her eyes sadly before she reached down, took Alice’s hand and followed Jed down the hall. Sarah, wisely, kept Alice walking beside her as they strove to stay a few paces behind their upset brother.

Little Alice looked at her brother’s back with concern creasing her six-year-old face. She watched as Jed’s shoulders shook slightly as he was obviously once again trying to put the protective walls around his feelings. Sarah’s gaze never left the plush blue carpet rolling slowly by under her feet.

Mrs. Gatores, their mother, had died from an unknown alien illness that had also taken the lives of half of her fellow crewmembers aboard the spaceship Megellanic. The Megellanic was a class-A ship capable of inter-dimensional travel. Its crew was on a science mission when, after a few weeks, the strange virus was discovered on the ship.

The Gatores children were some of the first to see the virus strike, for many of the children on board the Megellanic caught the illness first. However, the crew soon discovered that the virus was fatal to adults. The captain’s first officer died in only a few days.

Sarah, Jed, and their mother were put into quarantine along with the other sick crewmembers as they caught the virus. Young Alice and their father were fortunate enough not to catch it. Fortunately it was found that the younger children in quarantine happened to get better faster than the

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adults did. Nevertheless, Jed sat beside their mother's bed while she drew her final breath; Sarah was still unable to rise from her own bed.

Five months had passed and Jed, Sarah knew, had still not come to terms with their mother's death. Yes, she still missed her mother as well...but something about seeing their mother pass on must have disturbed Jed for it didn't seem like he only missed her. There must be something more....

Their father had told Sarah to try to be kind and gentle about Jed's feelings in hopes that he would soon fall back into being his old self. Sarah hoped it would be soon for she missed talking to her brother without his constant lapses of temper. Coming out of her reverie, Sarah looked down at Alice who was tugging on her hand.

"What is it?" Sarah asked quietly so as not to disturb Jed walking ahead of them.

"Could we go find a gym room?" the young girl asked.

The Recreation Rooms...of course! Sarah thought to herself as she nodded and smiled at her little sister, *That will certainly cheer Jed up!*

Sarah crossed over to the other side of the hall and pressed one of the white buttons below the black, liquid color display panel that hung on the wall. Apparently, the monitors on the level they were on had yet to be activated. It took a few seconds for the monitor to come to life. Jed turned around as the monitor panels throughout the whole hall flickered to life and announced their activation with a chime.

"What are you doing?" Jed commanded as he turned towards her, raising an eyebrow and making a face as if he thought his older sister was crazy.

Sarah ignored her brother and pressed a colored square along the bottom of the screen.

"Question...where is the nearest recreation room?" Sarah requested as she looked at the screen.

"Answer...five doors down, left hand side," a computerized voice answered.

"Whoa!" little Alice replied as she stepped up for a closer look.

"Come on!" Sarah said in excitement as she led the race down the hall.

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As they approached the door to the recreation room all three children stood confused as the door didn't open on its own.

"Maybe you have to touch it. . .," Alice suggested as she reached out to touch the door with her small hand.

As she drew her hand back, the door slowly opened. Little Alice's eyes widened in shock as she saw the strange creatures that seemed to cover everything in the room.

"Cute!" Alice exclaimed.

Upon hearing her voice, the creatures stood up on their tentacle legs. The top of their coral-looking flat heads tipped toward the children to display two rows of sharp teeth chewing viciously on only air.

"I don't think they're too cute now!" Sarah stated nervously as they backed away from the door.

The three children turned and ran down the hall as the creatures poured out of the room after them. Jed looked behind them realizing that they wouldn't be able to outrun the creatures. He ran ahead to the nearest door and slapped his hand on it.

The door slid open obligingly and the children jumped inside. They leaned their backs against the door in relief after it closed. A large object suddenly slammed into the outside of the door. Alice screamed and threw her hands over her head as Jed and Sarah jumped away from the door.

The door was slowly forced open a crack and one of the creatures thrust their tentacles inside the door. Alice ran, terrified, across the room to her brother and sister as the creature threaded its tentacles into the door and pulled the door shut once more.

Jed and Sarah looked at each other worriedly. Jed slowly crossed the room and tried to force the door back open. As the door opened a crack, the creature put three tentacles into the room and grabbed onto Jed's arm. It pulled him toward its wide mouth opening and closing with its sharp teeth.

Jed yelled and reached out with his free hand to his older sister for help. Sarah and Alice grabbed hold onto his arm and pulled him free of the creature's grasp. The three of them toppled onto the floor in a heap and the creature shut the door once more, leaving the children in the room.

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“What are those things?” Sarah asked as they each got up off the light blue-carpeted floor.

“I don’t know...,” Jed replied.

“I want to go back to Daddy!” Alice replied in a whimper.

“We can’t go back to Daddy right now! We’ve just been locked into this room by a bunch of vicious creatures,” Jed snapped.

Alice bit her lower lip and sniffled as Sarah drew her into her arms to hug her.

“Don’t yell at her, she doesn’t understand...I don’t even understand!” Sarah exclaimed heatedly.

“Well if you hadn’t decided to go to the Rec Room maybe we wouldn’t be trapped by a bunch of monsters right now!” Jed yelled back as he crossed his arms and sat on the edge of the king-sized bed in the middle of the room.

“How was I to know...? Ugh...Never mind,” Sarah replied as she threw up her hands. “Let’s try to figure out a way to get out of here.”

“Fine,” Jed answered, rolling his eyes.

“Perhaps there is a vent or some type of access tunnel in here...,” Sarah said out loud, musing to herself.

“Tch...,” Jed exclaimed as he rolled his eyes.

Obstinate as ever, even when we are all in danger, Sarah thought to herself.

She instructed Alice to look along the wall for any type of vent in the room.

“But I have to go potty...,” Alice replied quietly.

Sarah rolled her eyes and led Alice across the room to a door labeled lavatory. It slid open and Alice went inside. After the door closed, Sarah got down on her hands and knees to look along the base of the wall for any vents.

“Aren’t you going to help?” she called up to Jed who still sat on the edge of the bed.

“I am. I’m looking from here,” he replied stubbornly.

Sarah sighed to herself and lowered her head to look under a Victorian style wooden dresser. Alice came out of the bathroom wiping her clean yet wet hands on her jumper.

“Sare...”

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“Yes Alice?” Sarah replied absently as she sat back up onto her knees and proceeded to tighten the strap of her overalls over her left shoulder.

“There is another door....”

“Where!” Sara exclaimed, jumping up and turning around.

“In the bathroom.”

“Okay let’s check it out...you coming, Jed?”

“I guess so,” Jed replied.

The three kids walked into the stainless steel bathroom and opened the other door at its far end. As they entered into the new room, the bathroom door slid shut behind them. Sarah looked around at the couches, chairs, and coffee table arranged in the large room.

“This must be a living room,” Sarah replied.

“Na Duh!” Jed replied as he walked around and sat on the couch.

Sarah watched him in frustration for a moment and then crossed over to the large window showing the multicolored Jupiter spinning lazily below them.

“Can we try this door?” Alice asked.

“Why not,” Sarah replied, smiling, trying to keep up hope about the situation.

She picked up a metal candlestick holder from the table beside the window and crossed the room.

Jed stood up from the couch as Sarah neared the door. Alice walked a few steps behind her sister. Sarah touched the door and it slowly opened halfway, revealing another coral headed, sharp toothed, tentacle creature suspended in the upper part of the open door. Getting a sudden inspiration, Sarah wedged her back along the edge of the door and braced her feet against the threshold.

“Come on, Alice...you first!” Sarah exclaimed not daring to look up at the creature.

Alice climbed tentatively over Sarah’s legs and spilled into the hallway. The creature in the door reached down for Sarah but its tentacles were tangled in her long curly blond hair. Sarah tossed Jed the candlestick holder.

“Help me, Jed!” she cried as the creature began tugging on her hair.

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Jed picked up the candlestick and tried to whack the creature over Sarah's head. He managed to hit the creature hard and it arched itself out of the doorway. Sarah gasped in surprise as the door suddenly began to force itself shut again. She jumped out of the way and pulled her hair free as she landed on her backside at Alice's feet.

They watched as the door finished shutting the last few centimeters and the creature latched itself back onto the door. Sarah stood up a bit shakily and looked down the hall. There was a creature latched unto every door.

"What about Jed?" Alice asked in a small voice.

"He'll be fine...", Sarah stated, trying to sound encouraging. "We'd better go get Dad."

"We can't get Jed out?" Alice asked.

"I don't think I could hold the door open wide enough again, for him to get out...you barely had enough room...", Sarah replied as she glanced down the hall where five of the creatures had started toward them. "Besides I think it is time we go get help!"

She grabbed Alice's hand and pulled her down the hall as they ran toward the other set of elevators she knew had to be around the turn of the hall. She was wrong....

Sarah looked to her left and to her right as they came to the intersection in the hall.

"Great!" Sarah exclaimed smacking her head with the palm of her hand. "The elevators are in the center spoke!"

"Huh...?"

"Remember, Alice, what you said when you saw the pictures of the station?" Sarah asked as they continued running down the hall to their left.

"Uh huh...I said it looked like a pile of bike tires."

"Yeah," Sarah replied as they turned down another hallway which headed back toward the center, "the elevators run up and down the center."

At the end of the hallway, the elevator door opened upon sensing their presence. Sarah and Alice stepped into the elevator car and watched as the creatures came to a stop right outside the closing door.

VIRGINIA LORI JENNINGS

“Command Hub please...,” Sarah commanded.

“Authorization code...,” the computer voice stated.

“Do you know it?” Alice asked.

“Dad said that if we needed to find him...tell the elevator...do you remember?” Sarah asked pointedly as she looked down to her sister.

“Beta Alpha 990!” Alice answered, giggling.

“Authorization code confirmed...,” the computer voice stated as the car began to lower.

After a few moments the car finally came to a rest, the children looked around waiting for the doors to open. Instead, the car began to turn and the two girls placed a hand on the wall behind them for balance. The car turned 180 degrees before it finally stopped. The doors opened and the children looked out into a large room filled with many computer terminals and chairs.

“Hey girls!” Mr. Jack Gatores called as he made his way around a few of the computer terminals on the other side of the room. “How does the new station look eh?”

Sarah didn’t know how to explain to her father what they had seen on the upper decks. Well, the truth was, she did know how to explain it. However, would the words come? Would her father really believe them?

“Where’s Jed? The two of you didn’t get into another disagreement again did you?” Jack asked.

Their father stood with his hands on his hips and cocked his head inquiringly, though in amusement.

“Jed is trapped,” Alice exclaimed frightened.

“Trapped?” Mr. Gatores replied, bending down and putting his hands on his knees to coming to eye level with his youngest daughter. “Where’s he trapped at...maybe we can find him on the cameras...do you want to help?”

Dad still doesn’t get that this isn’t a game..., Sarah thought to herself exasperatedly.

Alice nodded her head and Mr. Gatores picked her up, setting her on one of the stools behind one of the computer terminals.

“Dad, there’s something you should know...,” Sarah began.

VISIONARY FROM THE STARS

“Hold on just one second, cupcake,” Mr. Gatores replied as he pointed out a button on the console in front of Alice. “Push that one there and you can look for him on the first deck.

“Now then, you had something you wanted to tell me about?” Jack said to his eldest daughter as he turned from the viewscreen for a moment.

Sarah bit her lip as she saw the large screen in the front of the room turn to view the upper deck where they had been only a few minutes ago. She pointed past her father at the viewscreen. Mr. Gatores turned and frowned at what he saw.

About one hundred of the flat coral-headed tentacled creatures were walking up and down the hallway. Many others were already latched to the door like the one Sarah and her brother and sister confronted. They all seemed to be waiting...their teeth gnawing empty air as if they were hungry.

“What are those creatures doing in here?” Mr. Gatores asked no one sternly. “I’ll need to call for a containment crew to be dispatched from Space Command Central. We’ll need to get these things cleaned out of here.”

Mr. Jack Gatores walked over to another console and typed out a message. Pressing another button, he then turned back toward the girls.

“All right now, please don’t go up to level one. We don’t want to find out if these creatures are friendly or hostile.”

“They’re not friends!” little Alice put in as she slid off her chair.

She fell to the floor and dropped down to her hands and knees. She stood up and brushed her hands off on the seat of her overalls.

“Whoa! That was a mighty big jump young cadet...next time don’t forget your parachute!”

Alice giggled and saluted her father playfully.

“Dad this is serious...,” Sarah began.

“I know it is, dear, but those creatures are doing no one any harm as long as they stay up on level one. I can’t possibly catch them all myself anyway.”

“No Dad...Jed is trapped up there!” Sarah replied in consternation.

VIRGINIA LORI JENNINGS

“You two weren’t playing about that were you?” Jack asked his children as they shook their heads. “All right, so exactly where is he?”

“Level one...,” Sarah replied. “He’s in one of the rooms a few doors down from the recreation room.”

“Which one...what color was the carpet in the hallway?” Jack added once he noticed that the girls didn’t know which recreation room they were talking about.

There were four different recreation rooms on level one.

“Blue!” Alice exclaimed.

“Okay...” Mr. Gatores tapped a few buttons into the computer console nearby.

“Access code...,” he mumbled to himself as his fingers danced across the console.

The two girls looked at the front viewscreen as views from various rooms flashed by.

“Ah...there he is...,” Mr. Gatores exclaimed.

He depressed a button and tapped another one.

“Jed...can you hear me, son?”

Sarah watched as the Jed on the screen looked around confusedly for the origin of his father’s voice. He walked in a small circle in the middle of the living room that the girls had left him.

“Dad?”

“Yeah it’s me, son; you okay, sport?”

“For now...but there are some strange creatures up here. I think one is chewing through the door,” Jed replied, looking warily over his shoulder towards the door (and towards the camera his father and sisters was watching him from.)

“Okay, don’t move, we’ll be there to get you out in just a few minutes.”

Jack Gatores released the button he’d been holding down and turned to another computer.

“You two girls stay here where it is safe. I’m going to go and get Jed out of there. Sarah, you like to read...see if you can find anything in the station’s archive files about these creatures. Alice, you stay with your sister.”

“Yes Dad,” Sarah replied as she turned to head to the far wall.

VISIONARY FROM THE STARS

She sat on a stool in front of a console with a screen set into it. Her head moved back and forth, as she read the files one by one. Little Alice stood up on tiptoe as Mr. Gatores bent down to kiss her forehead. As their father stepped into the elevator to go after their brother, Alice walked over and climbed up on a stool beside her big sister.

Jed walked around the living room nervously. He could hear the grinding of the alien creature's teeth against the metal of the door. He dreaded to think what would happen if the creature got through. To ease his nervousness he sat (or rather sank) down into the large soft couch in the middle of the room.

He soon began hearing snapping noises and looked around anxiously. Jed stood and walked up to the door and noticed that there was a clear substance oozing from the door unto the carpet. Sparks hissed out from the edge of the door and dropped down to ignite the goop pooling up on the carpet. The fire leapt as if it had been given limitless fuel.

Jed looked around for some way to put out the fire. However, there were no loose objects in the room except for the furniture. The fire blazed even higher and began to spread throughout the room.

Sarah and Alice looked up as an alarm blared inside the command room. Sarah jumped up off the stool and ran to another computer terminal. Lights were flashing all over the top of the console as Sarah tried to make sense of what the alarm was trying to tell her. She looked up at the main viewscreen and suddenly she knew what was wrong.

Mr. Gatores had left the viewscreen on showing Jed inside the same living room in which he had been trapped. Fire had started to crawl along the floor. Sarah pressed a button labeled fire control and was relieved to see the sprinkler system in the room turn on.

"Alice, do you remember the button Dad pressed to talk to Jed?"

"Yeah..." Alice said, hopping off her stool and crossing the room towards her.

"Go press it..."

Little Alice climbed up on one of the stools at the communications terminal and pressed the button she had seen her father press.

VIRGINIA LORI JENNINGS

“Jed...Jed!” Sarah called to the screen.

“Sarah, is that you?” her brother replied as he appeared on the screen, still not looking directly into the hidden camera.

“Yeah, do the sprinklers seem to be having any effect?” she asked.

“Not really and uh, there they go,” Jed stated looking up toward the ceiling.

Sarah looked down at the controls she sat in front of.

“I didn’t shut them off!” she replied frantically as she pushed a few other buttons to no avail. “Jed, there is a fire extinguisher under a panel beside the bathroom door...I remember seeing it there before...do you see it now?”

“Yeah I got it...,” Jed replied as Sarah and Alice watched him pull the pin in the extinguisher and begin spraying the flames.

Sarah and Alice both gasped though, as one of the creatures appeared and crawled over the camera. To Sarah and Alice it looked as though he was trying to chew through the very screen that they were watching. Suddenly the picture went blank and Sarah knew that the camera had been destroyed.

“Jed, watch out!” little Alice called through the microphone in front of her.

The two sisters were answered by only ominous static.

“The communications link to that room must be down as well...Let’s see if we can’t find Dad,” Sarah stated.

She bravely put on a facade of enthusiasm in order to keep Alice from getting worried. She flicked through the different hall visuals until she finally found their father. However, she flicked to a new hallway just as fast for Alice’s sake when she saw their father backed up against the wall trying to keep the creatures away from him with nothing but a pole he must have grabbed from a storage closet.

Sarah paused and thought hard for a few moments.

“What’s wrong, Sarah?” Alice asked, as she obviously hadn’t seen the view of the hallway that Sarah had seen.

“We’re going to go help Dad,” Sarah answered determinedly.

“But he told us to stay here...,” Alice replied.

VISIONARY FROM THE STARS

“He’s in trouble...we’re going to help him...and Jed,” Sarah exclaimed as she slid off the stool and took Alice’s hand as she too jumped off her own stool.

The two girls stepped into the elevator and asked it to take them to level one.

Mr. Gatores walked down the hall as he left the elevator. He kept a wary eye out for the creatures he had seen on the camera down in the control room. Having an inspiration, he pressed his hand on the door to one of the janitorial closets. He found a metal pole that had been left in there among the boxes and equipment.

“Might come in handy if I come across any of those creatures...,” Mr. Gatores said to himself.

He had gone about halfway down the hall when suddenly the creatures came swarming out of the doors around him. He was trapped! Mr. Gatores backed up against the wall and continued trying to ward off the now drooling creatures. Making a face of disgust, he kicked out at one of the creatures who had boldly jumped out at him.

It wasn’t long however, before Mr. Gatores saw an even more sickening sight. A wave of fire was marching steadily down the paths of saliva that the creatures had left behind.

“Saliva that burns...ugh!” he exclaimed as he unceremoniously skewered one of the creatures and flung it into the flames. “There are too many of you anyhow!”

Sarah and Alice emerged from the elevator to find the emergency sprinklers on in the hallway.

“Wasn’t it Christopher Robin in Winnie the Pooh that said ‘tut-tut it looks like rain?’” Sarah asked Alice sarcastically, although her face had turned grim.

The two girls had walked halfway down the hall when they saw why the sprinklers had turned on. A fire raged in the hall and marched towards them with incredible speed. Sarah turned and ran back down the hall a few paces. She jerked a twin barreled fire extinguisher out from the wall.

VIRGINIA LORI JENNINGS

With Alice holding one of the barrels and Sarah holding the other, they started to put out the flames coming towards them. Soon the fire, instead of the girls, was retreating.

They followed the retreating fire down the hall until they found a group of the creatures, still alive, walking among the flames. Hoping to blind the creatures to their approach, Sarah aimed the nozzle at the creatures and let the foamy, green plant laced mixture spray over them. As the flames in that section of the hallway were put out by the foam, the sprinklers stopped. Looking down and expecting the creatures to attack, Sarah saw that the foam had evaporated as usual, but the creatures were now immobile.

Frowning, she prodded one with the toe of her shoe and jumped back expecting it to jump at her. The creature didn't move.

"What happened?" Alice asked as she wrung water from her long straight almond-colored hair.

Sarah watched as a few water droplets fell unto one of the creatures beside her sister. The water absorbed into the surface of the creatures textured head and a pink splotch was left behind.

"I don't know...Let's get going though," Sarah replied as she herded Alice away from the docile creatures.

Sarah had only counted five more open doors when they felt the sprinklers again. The two sisters hurried down the hall as noises of some sort of confrontation reached their ears. Their shoes and soaked overalls added muffled squishy noises to the din.

In the end, Sarah and Alice found that it was their father making most of the noise as he berated himself for letting one of the creatures to close or just yelling in general as if he hoped to scare the creatures off. Mr. Gatores stopped though, as he heard the girls yell for him. He looked down the hall to his left and saw them running towards him, hauling between them one of the stations extinguishers; "Chloroblast foam" as most rookies liked to call them.

"Sarah...Alice, I told you to stay down in the command room! Watch out for those creatures!" Mr. Gatores called, distressed at seeing his children walking straight toward the frenzied creatures.

VISIONARY FROM THE STARS

“We found out...” The rest of Sarah’s words were drowned out as she and Alice sprayed the Chloroblast over the creatures and the fire surrounding their father.

Mr. Gatores stood stunned as he watched the creatures stiffen and fold stiffly down to flat plates on the floor.

“The Chloroblast kills them!” Mr. Gatores exclaimed shocked. “Or perhaps it only puts them into hibernation.”

“Why do you say that?” Sarah asked confusedly.

“Turn slowly and look behind you,” Mr. Gatores stated, careful to keep his voice even.

Sarah looked over her shoulder and then whipped the fire extinguisher’s targeting nozzle from between her and Alice. She sprayed the oncoming creature squarely on its head. As the foam dissipated, she saw the pink splotch on the surface of the creature’s plate like head.

“I assumed that you sprayed every creature in the hall as you came, am I right?” Mr. Gatores asked stepping over the stiffened creatures that surrounded his feet as he went over to his daughters for a closer look at the creature they had sprayed.

“Yeah...Alice happened to drip some water on this one...perhaps that’s what woke it up.”

“Are you sure it was this one?”

“Definitely...The pink splotch appeared as the water was absorbed.”

“Something to note...,” Mr. Gatores replied, more to himself as he then turned to his two daughters, “Even though I told you two to stay in the command hub...”

Sarah lowered her gaze.

“Thank you for your help,” he finished as he reached out to wrap them in a hug.

Sarah managed a weak smile but it soon faded as she remembered why they had come to find their father in the first place.

“Jed was in the room and a fire started. The creatures got in,” she stammered, breaking away from her father’s grasp in desperation.

“Standard safety procedure...All doors to living quarters open in the event of a fire. We’d better go look for him,” Mr. Gatores replied grimly.

VIRGINIA LORI JENNINGS

Sarah, Alice and their father walked down the hall to find the room in which Jed had been trapped. As they looked in through the doorway, they saw what seemed to have been a Chloroblast explosion.

“I see Jed found the fire extinguisher handy as well,” Mr. Gatores replied.

“Look he left the room...you can see his footprints in the wet carpet,” Sarah added.

“Cool!” Alice exclaimed, looking behind at her own footprints.

Sarah took Alice’s hand as they followed the trail down the rest of the hall.

Mr. Gatores shifted the fire extinguisher he had offered to carry for his children onto his other hip as it was becoming heavy. He looked up however as he heard Sarah gasp and Alice whimper. He saw a larger (decidedly more grotesque) version of the creatures that seemed to have plagued level one. It stood tall on three of its tentacles and pinned a squirming Jed against the wall with the other four.

Mr. Gatores strode forward and emptied the remainder of the contents of the fire extinguisher unto the large creature. As the creature stiffened and then folded to the floor, Mr. Gatores led a shaking Jed away from it and back over to his sisters.

“That was the last one...,” Jed replied shakily to his Dad as his sisters hugged him in relief.

“Are you all right?” Mr. Gatores asked his son in worry.

“Yeah I’m fine,” Jed replied with a nod.

“Let’s get back down to the command room...I’d feel better knowing that you three were with me. I don’t know how those things got in here, and there is no way to tell if there are any more of those creatures wandering around the station.”

The three children nodded in agreement with their father and followed him silently back through the legions of the unconscious coral-headed creatures on their way toward the elevators.