

## Terra Beyond 2012

### E's Eyes ONLY!

December 7, 2012

What a day! Like there isn't enough to be worried about in today's crazy world, we have to write a report on what events caused the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. I mean my grandmother wasn't born yet!

I have to find a better spot to hide this journal. My brat brother has been snooping in my room again. If these pages fall into the wrong hands, like someone who will snitch to my custodial parent, I will be grounded forever.

December 8, 2012

I'm spending the weekend with Dad. Plans are for dinner out, as usual, some Christmas shopping, and a movie. Dad promised to give me a hand with my Pearl Harbor assignment.

I can't see the point in any of it! All the talk at school is about the world imploding, or ceasing to exist on December 21. Grandma told me, at Thanksgiving, that during her life there had been several scares like this one. Twitter is going nuts with how the human race will go the way of the dinosaurs. Pretty scary stuff! It sure is hard to concentrate on making a Christmas list of what I want from my family when we may not see December 25<sup>th</sup>.

Just in case, I put together a short wish list.

How about: 1. Extending my eleventh birthday to April, instead of Christmas Eve?

2. Moving in with my dad?

3. Spending Christmas with Grandma, and riding her horses in the snow one more time?

## 2023

The ground began to convulse beneath Erica's threadbare, used, and mismatched, athletic shoes. She had forgotten about the prophets of doom and gloom orbiting the planet prior to her eleventh birthday. At twenty-two, her freshly minted college degree would be of more use as butt paper.

She scanned the doorways and alleys along her route. Her goodwill outfit reflected from the occasional window. Much of the neighborhood was boarded up. A budding fashionista during her high school days, Erica had since cultivated the grunge look. The rattier the look the better; you could get mugged in a heartbeat if you looked like you had something worth taking.

She waved to the drab-looking clerk on her way into the store. Shelves were getting bare. She picked out a can of noodle soup and a beat-up ancient-looking can of tuna hiding behind a stack of spinach cans. She was moving through the aisles scouting out the sparsely stocked shelves when they began to shake, sway, and tumble to the floor.

A loud roar filled her ears, which felt ready to pop from the increase in pressure. It reminded her of the sound of a tornado, but much louder than the few she'd been through while in college in Lubbock. It threatened to deafen her. Black clouds formed close to the ground; her first thought was that another one of the huge oil refineries that dominated Houston had exploded. Then a blinding, blue-white, ray of light penetrated the cloudbank. That was the last thing Erica recalled as she peeked out from under a shelf, which had pinned her to the dirty, nondescript, vinyl floor of the local food-mart. Screams of terror from the street out front echoed through her mind as she lost consciousness.

Her next foray into a functional state was to open gritty, swollen, eyes to the painful glare of an overhead light. A hospital room or triage center was the first thing that registered. That thought was quickly deleted when her grandmother leaned over her.

"It's going to be alright, Little E." Grandma raised Erica's right hand and held it in hers. Grandma was one of the few people on earth that ever called her Little E.

Okay, she thought. It's time to reassess the situation. I have not been little for a long time. In a pair of heels, her five-foot-ten allowed her to look most men in the eye. Flat on her back in a strange room with her deceased grandmother leaning over her, Erica was frightened and disoriented.

"Hey! Somebody let me out of this contraption. I need a bathroom, now!" she yelled, as loud as her raspy voice and sore throat would allow her.

Not a soul responded to her urgent demands, and Granny had vanished. She began to fear the worst. The weight of the falling shelves did me in, she thought, and I'm dead—a better alternative explanation, she figured, than to admit she might have gone around the bend. Grandma had become the voice in her head; in turn she was encouraging, sympathetic to a point, Erica's taskmaster, and disciplinarian. Her grandmother's apparition had a quirky sense of humor, much as she had in life. Erica was concerned about her mental state. Her grandmother had passed from this world six years earlier.

Two silent figures entered the room. Their white uniforms fit like wetsuits; all that was visible through clear, bubble-like masks were their paper-white complexions. They didn't attempt to lower the tall rails that confined her to the bed, so she could relieve herself. Instead, they changed the bag floating in the air and pumping its contents into her left arm. Erica opened her mouth to protest, and again to request a toilet or even a bedpan, but not a sound came from her vocal cords. One more attempt to communicate with the pair proved too much for her. Erica sank into a, cold, black void.

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Erica emerged from the abyss floating among the stars. Vertigo gripped her as she gazed down at our planet. She speculated that the scene must be what the astronauts saw when they hovered above the earth and performed the tasks of repairing the space station. Okay, so where is my spacesuit? She wondered if she was having an out-of-body experience, but didn't all the information on the subject say that people are able to see themselves when that happens? She couldn't see herself, and didn't have a clue where her physical being was.

Her ride out of our solar system allowed Erica a close-up view of planets that prior to then could only be seen second hand. Out around Saturn, she briefly looked back at the fading Earth. To her dismay, the once blue planet was now a murky, grayish brown. The thought penetrated her groggy consciousness; the change in color could not be a good sign.

She seemed to be picking up speed, and soon the Milky Way was far behind her. At that point, unfamiliar stars and planets whizzed past; she was aware of a tumbling sensation. Her limbs lost all feeling before a penetrating cold took hold of her. Then oblivion.

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Her alien captors began the thawing process. Time had escaped Erica; she hadn't a clue how long she'd been in cryo-sleep. She possessed a smidgen of knowledge regarding cryogenics from college physics, but little was known, on Earth, about the effects of inducing long-term exposure to the deep freeze. Straw-like tentacles protruded from every orifice on her numb body. She was unable to open her eyes. Finally, after repeated attempts, she succeeded in focusing on her surroundings. Her heart rate doubled when her slowly clearing vision caught sight of what looked to be a huge sliver squid suspended above her. The tentacles imprisoning her traced back to the monster hovering over her strapped-down form. "Calm down, Little E. You will do yourself damage. What you see is only a medical device, which is unfamiliar to you."

I knew it! I've passed on, and this must be hell, she thought. Erica couldn't come up with another scenario to explain how she could be hearing her grandmother.

Each time she awoke, her sojourn into the strange environment lasted longer. The pale aliens who'd made first contact were conspicuously absent from her cold cell. A black robot hovered above the floor and saw to her needs. Red and blue lights flashed in a line from right to left where a human would have eyes. Its arms were similar to the automated workers that had put millions of humans out of work. Those robots were

familiar to her, but this one appeared to be a thousand times more advanced. It never spoke to her, but seemed to know Erica's every need before she could verbalize it. She wondered if it was telepathic, or was receiving instructions from beings that were. Whenever she became overly stressed, her grandmother's voice would appear out of the strange metallic odor that permeated the room.

The voice in her subconscious informed Erica that she now had an implant in her head. Its function was supposedly to enable her to speak several alien languages. Her minimal biological studies were also enhanced while she slept, and while running on a round treadmill. She felt like a hamster on that contraption, but the knowledge gained in the process helped shed some light on her captivity. She was on an incredibly advanced version of Noah's Ark!

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A twenty-five year old altered version of Erica stepped onto the surface of a new world. Truthfully, if you counted the cryo-sleep Little E was really three hundred and twenty-five. The sweet smell of wildflowers assaulted her senses and crisp clean air filled her lungs. Erica found herself surrounded by few hundred passengers; she didn't realize there were so many others on the same journey. She speculated that the ship must have been immense if they all were kept in isolation as she was, following their stay in the cryogenics lab. The young humans stood on a hill overlooking a lush valley. Sparkling clear water flowed over a small dam before it wandered snake-like through the breathtaking landscape.

The sky was foreign, more of a turquoise, and the clouds did appear to have a silver lining. A distant moon with a satellite of its own was clearly visible in the light of day; another, smaller, moon appeared to be setting on the horizon. The ground began to tremble, which panicked many in the group. Erica assumed they had all experienced the earthquake-like trembles that she remembered before arriving on the alien transport. Erica listened to the thunder accompanying the vibrations; she felt in the soles of her leather-like boots. She recognized the cadence from her childhood. Hundreds of blacks, and bays, sorrels, and grays galloped with their tails flying high and manes flowing. Tears filled her eyes, and joy filled her heart at the wonder of it. She called to the heavens. "Look, Grandma, paradise!" Erica knew her grandmother heard her and was smiling down on her, and on the beautiful animals she'd taught Erica to appreciate.

Most of the others were younger than Erica; they appeared to be from places around Earth, or what the aliens referred to as Terra. It was her understanding that they were to be met by a representative of the indigenous population, which probably accounted for the young age of her companions. The young were more accepting of new situations, and they didn't carry the baggage or prejudices of their elders.

Erica tore her eyes from the spectacular equines quenching their thirst. She scanned the sky and the land below, but found not a sign of a transport or vehicle. A, huge, golden stallion separated from the herd to lope up the hill. Erica's companions shrieked and scattered; she held her ground. She didn't sense any danger from the approaching horse. He was magnificent; oddly, his eyes were a deep violet. Transfixed, Erica reached out to stroke his neck when he approached her. "You're a handsome devil,"

she said in her native English. Erica almost fell over from shock when he answered,

“Thank you, Terran Erica. Welcome to Equus Prime.”

Right before her eyes, he transformed into a huge, human-like male; he was clad in a golden suit that hugged his impressive physique. The thin formfitting material didn't leave much to her imagination. She stood there stupefied.

He extended his hand in greeting. “I am ambassador Quinlynn Colt from central command. I am here to escort you and the other Terrans to our capital, for orientation.” She continued to stare at him, but didn't acknowledge his greeting. “Terran Erica, is your translator malfunctioning?”

Erica gave herself a mental shake. “Sorry the whole shift from horse to man was a bit unexpected. So, is this your real form?”

“Would you prefer I take another form?”

“Are all the horses shape-shifters?” She sounded disappointed even to her own ears.

“Most of what you refer to as horses were transported here, much as you were. We assume their shape to ascertain their health and learn more about them. I was led to believe you have a unique knowledge of the animals.”

Erica figured that her college studies, which had been enhanced by her biology and medical training in transport, as well as her training with Grandma's horses were the reason she was chosen for relocation.

“I may have been a little premature about the paradise reference,” she whispered to her grandmother. Erica had a feeling that Grandma's advise was going to prove invaluable.

She wondered what her escort's actual form was, and where the thin hand-held device that he held in his hand had come from. He pressed the matchbox size device, which transported the group to orientation in the capital of their new home world.