

Years 5 & 6
3rd Place: Aishmeen Kaur
Year 5, Aspiri Primary School

A New Beginning

"I don't understand why."

"Come on. You are not stupid."

"Of course, I'm no –"

"Tea, Mr Miles?"

Someone saunters in. Rather, something.

"Not now, 604, not now."

The robot cocked his head but kept a straight face. He was indistinguishable from a human, and only his name gave him away.

I ignored the robot and took a deep breath. I looked Jake straight in the eye.

"Nothing. Will. Happen." I slammed my hands on the table for emphasis.

"Emma, are you seriously willing to risk the whole human race?"

Darwin raised his shaggy head and barked. Jake rolled his eyes.

"Are you willing to risk every living life form on earth?"

Darwin stretched and lay down again. I bit my lip. Jake had a point there. His green eyes locked with mine, and I opened my mouth to say something, but he beat me to it.

Jake placed a hand on my shoulder.

"Emma, you know what gamma rays are, don't you?"

I raised an eyebrow. A faint smirk flickered somewhere on his face, and he continued,

"Mmm. The one we have done lots of thorough research on. And you also know that –"

I raised a hand. I had enough of his lectures.

"Yes. I know – gamma ray bursts striking Earth from near Supernova. Potential asteroid strikes. The triple star system WR 104 is going Supernova."

"Yes, yes. Last year it would have been no big deal, but now we know that the gamma ray burst is pointed in our direction. A direct hit could tear the Earth's ozone layer apart, frying all life forms on the surface and changing climate and habitability for thousands of years after that. We don't know if asteroids will come with it, but I'm sure we already have enough danger. We will be doomed if we don't do anything."

"When put that way, it sounds . . . disastrous," I said with uncertainty. He took a deep breath. He then suddenly clenched his fists and shouted.

"BECAUSE IT IS!"

I looked up in shock. It took both of us a moment to take in what happened.

The silence lasted for eternity. Jake looked exasperated.

"Look, Emma, I'm sorry. I know that it'll be hard adapting to a new life, and I know that you still doubt our research and that the Supernova won't happen, but –"

"Because. It. WON'T!" My eyes were on fire.

"JUST listen to ME for once, WILL YOU?!" Jake roared, his pale cheeks glowing a faint red. It went back and forth, but soon the argument simmered down. I threw my face into my hands, unsure what to do. Jake kept his cool, obviously with great control.

“We sent 82 out to space, and he found a planet B. You should know because we saw all the images that 82 backed up in our files. The government already has spaceships just in case of an emergency like this.” He paused.

“Sure, we will have to tweak them a bit to make them durable to immense energy and speed . . .”

“So, will you come with me to tell everyone?” Jake pleaded quietly. “We need to evacuate everyone and . . .” Jake hesitated. “Go to our new home.”

I narrowed my eyes, and he shifted uncomfortably in his chair. I had to strain my neck muscles to get them to nod.

Jake looked relieved and stopped fidgeting.

“Good. Tomorrow, quarter past ten.”

I raised an eyebrow.

He scratched the back of his head.

“Well, I might have already asked them . . .” He shrugged and grimaced.

“They said that it was a matter to discuss. The conversation was brief, and it was not in person . . .” He trailed off. Jake lingered for a moment and stood up to leave. I looked at him. His pale skin was paler than usual, and his ordinarily neat-light brown hair was eccentric. He took a glance around the room and opened his mouth to say something, but he instead silently closed the door.

I sat there, my mind astray. The silence was loud. I stood up and looked in the mirror. I want to say I saw a stranger, but these days I am like this. In front of me was a lightly tanned woman with ebony hair tied into a messy bun. She had the most piercing blue eyes that glistened when reflected by the sun. But the dark rings formed below them ruined it. She was wearing a white blouse completed with a jean skirt. That woman was me. I smiled, but it was only a small one.

“Miss Levine?” I gasped and swivelled around to only face 604. I allowed a laugh.

“Tea?” The robot inquired, extending an arm.

My mind was racing, and I was unsure about my decision. But then again, Jake had a point. I tried to take my mind off it by counting sheep and everything I could think of. I groaned. I didn’t think I would, but I fell sound asleep.

Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . .

I pulled my head under the covers and moaned. I soon realised that I would, one way or another, have to get out of bed anyway, so I rubbed my eyes and lazed out of bed. I slammed ‘stop’ on my alarm. The sun poured through my window, peeking out from the clouds. Birds were about their morning rituals, and a gentle cool breeze sailed into my room.

I took a quick shower and wore a navy business suit I was pretty fond of. I slipped into my heels and looked at myself in the mirror. I brushed my hair, silently screaming as I tried to untangle my knotted hair. I enviously looked at the girl on my oil bottle, wishing I had such silky hair. Today I let my hair out, and it curled at the edges. I walked through the hallway, and the clomping of my heels echoed around the silence.

Before leaving, I took a glance at Darwin. It seemed as if he had a sixth sense as he was already there, expecting me to come. He barked joyfully, and his tongue lolled out. I smiled and gave him a quick hug.

A car horn honked.

“Coming!” I yelled. I turned towards Darwin. “I’ve got to go,” I whispered.

I hastily grabbed my bags.

“Come on!” A familiar voice shouted in the distance. I hastily opened the door out to the front porch and locked it. I looked back at the modern two-storey house in front of me. I had lived here for half of my life, and I wasn’t willing to leave for another planet. With a sigh, I loped towards the car.

I opened the car door and accidentally shut it with a bang. I buckled my seatbelt inaudibly and looked forward. I could sense Jake looking at me with inquiring eyes. The engine’s speed increased as the accelerator was pressed. The engine started, revved, and the car jerked away, the houses soon out of sight. Jake tried to get some conversation going, but somebody had pressed my ‘mute’ button. We reached a red light. The light turned yellow, then red again, and after what seemed like eons, green.

The Prime Minister cleared his throat and made eye contact with everyone.

“I am pleased to announce that our world’s greatest scientists are here to tell us about some grave issues. Today, Thursday, 24th of January, year 138 647. They will discuss . . .”

His voice faded away. He cleared his throat once again, and his wrinkles frowned.

“To discuss something that could potentially destroy Earth.”

Murmurs drifted around the room, and people nudged the person next to them. The mood had alternately changed.

“Once again, please welcome Emma Levine and Jake Miles to present to us.”

There was light applause, and he stepped down the stage. He nodded towards us, his spectacles squatted on his nose.

There was a big audience. *Of course there was Emma*, a voice sneered in my mind. I took a deep breath and ignored the beads of sweat forming on the side of my neck.

“Good morning . . .”

I finished. There were more scared eyes. Jake added all the details and showed everyone exactly what we had found.

“Any questions?” An ocean of hands raised. I peered at Jake, but he acted as if he did this every day.

“Yes?” I pointed at a snooty-looking dwarf man with piggy eyes.

“Madam, may I ask why you didn’t tell us this before?”

There was a murmur of agreement, and a couple of hands fell.

Jake spoke up. “We didn’t want to give anyone any misleading information. That would cause false alarms and misunderstandings. Now that we have gathered all of our knowledge, we know that everything we have is 99% accurate.”

The dwarf-man sat down and gave us a dirty look.

“Anyone else?” I pointed at a woman wearing a grey blouse completed with navy pants and emerald eyes. Her voice was astoundingly posh.

“When, approximately, do you think this will happen?”

I bit my lip.

“November.”

There were gasps of shock, and the mood grew more frightened, tenser. The woman who posed the question sat back down, wobbling.

I cleared my throat.

“Before we answer any more questions, yes, we have found planet B.”

There were sighs of relief from everyone.

“An exoplanet is just a planet that is found in a different solar system to our own, and Kepler-452b was found 500 light-years away. In space terms, this is fairly close. Kepler-452b orbits its star at a distance of 156 million km; 97 million miles from its star (nearly the same distance as Earth from the Sun), with an orbital period of roughly 385 days, has a mass at least five times that of Earth and has a radius of around 1.5 times that of Earth. The temperature is perfectly suitable and has an equilibrium temperature of -8°C , a little warmer than Earth. We have accounted for oceans, and it holds approximately 79% ocean, of which 14% is fresh, potable water.”

There were nods and faces of relief at this information.

“This is remarkably fortunate because this would decrease poverty to 0% as everyone will have access to clean drinking water, which is, unfortunately, a problem right now,” I said in a single breath, and I was surprised at myself. I tucked away a strand of ebony hair and looked up. There was applause, but I wasn’t exactly expecting one.

The Prime Minister came up, and I stepped down. He began talking about irrelevant things, and Jake nudged me.

“That was awesome.”

I was about to reply, but something that the Prime Minister said caught my attention; “Those who would like to evacuate everyone, please raise your hands.”

He paused, finding the right words to say.

“This decision cannot be changed.” He lowered his eyes and fixed everyone with a cold, hard stare. “Those who oppose this decision to leave, please raise their hand.”

A substantial of hands raised. He beckoned us onto the stage. The Prime Minister spoke up. “The conference is dismissed.”

The space vessel was roughly rectangular, its edges soft and crawling with tubes and pistons. A blue flare lit behind it, propelling the craft smoothly onwards. The spacecraft has automated doors, central control and navigation system. The colours are bold. The neon orange and blue contrast with the dark emptiness of space. A magnificent but bleak view can be seen through the glass walls of the ship.

“We have evacuated everyone, destroyed anything that could be used against us if found by . . .”

Jake cleared his throat.

“Unique creatures.”

I nodded. We were one of the last people to leave. We had evacuated everyone, even every animal we could find.

“Missing home?” Jake implored, his eyes fixed on our radar.

“Yes, but we have already found a new one,” I pointed at a sphere-like planet nearly identical to Earth but more giant. We had found a new home, a new beginning.