

# End Of Earth

## Prologue

Date: December 6, 2162 Location: Old Earth Orbit, Space Station Beta

Eric walked down the dark silent corridor and stopped when he reached a window he wanted to take a moment to see the stars. He remembered being a small boy looking at those same stars while standing in his father's corn field. Eric was eighty-five years old, he had seen many things in his lifetime. Eric's thoughts were pulled back to the present when he felt a hand on his shoulder, the grip was firm but gentle at the same time. He knew exactly who the person was. "Good evening John." Eric said to his twenty year old grandson without turning around.

"Thinking about the past again grandpa?" John asked his Grandfather with a smile. He could always find Eric by the window every Thursday evening.

Eric's eyes began to water as tears filled them. "Only of your mother." He replied, lying through his teeth.

John walked closer to the window, he looked outside with curiosity. John never had the chance to see what Earth was like. It had been destroyed while he was a young child of two years. His Grandfather had never spoken to John about how the "big blue marble", as he referred to it, was destroyed and was never allowed to support life again. John had always been interested in the end of his world but could never find an official record of the incident. Sure there were several speculative reports about it on the Internet, but he never believed in them. John could remember asking Eric the important question "How did it all end?" ever since he first learned that there was a planet Earth and people actually lived on it. John's father had always managed to side step the matter every time he brought it up, so he would turn to his grandfather, who would also side step the question. John had given up his search five years ago when he figured that he would never know the fate of a planet once known as Earth.

Eric turned to his grandson. "John I believe it's time for you to know the truth." He started walking back down the corridor. Eric didn't move too quickly because of his age, this didn't bother John at all. Ever since Eric was diagnosed with cancer, John had learned to walk slowly at his side. At the end of the long hallway there was a sitting room where Eric often enjoyed reading the evening chronicle. The room was the size of a standard bedroom, at both ends sat two large shelves that held books. The other two walls held pictures of family and friends. In the middle of the room sat two chairs that faced each other with a small coffee table in between them. As John entered the room, he stood in awe. He had never entered the sitting room before in his life. John's grandfather always considered it private and off limits. Eric led

John over to a chair. They sat down across from each other. Eric looked around the room for a moment and then turned his attention back to John.

"John. Let me begin by telling you that I love you very much. I don't know how much time I have to tell you all of this before they come to get me." Eric said as he folded his arms.

John was confused and concerned. "What are you talking about?"

Eric sighed and continued. "I am one of the last humans to know the cause of Earth's destruction. I was ordered to keep it all a secret and never tell another living soul. But as you know, I won't be with you much longer. I feel that the truth must be made known. People have a right to know how the Earth ended." Eric leaned towards the coffee table and pressed a button on a small machine that was resting on it. "Begin recording. December the sixth two thousand one hundred and sixty-two. It's been almost sixty-two years since I took my last look at the planet called Earth. It was one of the most beautiful places that I have ever been. I was born in a town outside of Orlando in a state called Florida. When I was eighteen years old, a war broke out among the great powers, I believe it was between the United States and Australia. I was one of the first to be drafted and put into the service for my country. My first posting was aboard the Space Vessel Alaphei, she was a new vessel under the command of a Captain John Andrews. My job at first was just in the engine room, helping the engineer, making sure things ran smoothly..."

## **Chapter One: First Assignment**

Date: August 23, 2095 Location: Orbital Control Alpha, Earth Orbit

Ensign Eric Tompson stood in a brightly lit room waiting for a shuttle that would take him to his first duty assignment. There were several other crew members that were waiting with him. Eric wished he could wait in silence but that wasn't about to happen. the room was full of conversation, un-needed noise. Eric tried to block them all out but found it impossible to do. He would have to live with the noise.

"Excuse me" a pleasant voice said.

Eric felt a light tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see a young, blonde, female officer a few years older than himself. "Yes?"

"I noticed that you were standing here by yourself."

Eric nodded his head "And you thought I'd like some company."

"Well, yes." She responded. "We have been waiting for at least an hour now." She extended her right hand. "My name's Rebecca."

Eric took her hand and shook it lightly "Eric Tompson, nice to meet you." As he held her hand it felt good, like it was meant to be. He almost didn't want to let go.

"Is this your first space assignment?" Rebecca inquired.

Eric nodded "Yeah, not by choice though." He recalled the day the U.S. Government knocked on his door and informed him that his country needed him, that it was his duty.

"Oh." Rebecca said. "I Came on my own choice. But once this war is over I plan on going back home."

"You honestly believe Earth will still be around in the same condition after the war?"

Rebecca smiled "Well not exactly the same but it should be similar. That's the main reason the fighting is being moved into space, to avoid any possible harm to earth or its population."

"Except to those who give their lives up here." Eric added.

"Well you know how these things go, someone's got to declare victory." Rebecca said. She turned her attention to a vessel that was approaching them.

After the ship docked with the station, anxious men and women started to board leaving Rebecca and Eric alone in the airlock. "We should get going." Eric stated in a reluctant tone. He started to walk towards the doors but stopped when he felt a hand on his shoulder again.

"That vessel's full" Rebecca said "Come with me, I'll take you on my ship."

Eric was shocked "You have your own shuttle?"

She nodded and led him to another airlock a few doors down.

A few hours later Rebecca's shuttle docked with another ship twice its size. As the docking process completed, Eric stood from his chair and walked over to Rebecca who was grinning from ear to ear.

"You're quite the pilot ensign."

"Thanks Rebecca." Eric said.

"While we're on duty, you should refer to me as lieutenant or sir." She said in a serious voice. "Make a note of it."

Eric nodded his head, took a step backward and smiled "All right."

"Now let's get up to the bridge and report in."

"Yes ma'm." Eric replied.

The bridge of the Space Vessel Alaphei was typical for a ship its size. At the very back was the captain's chair and first officer station, both of which were empty at the moment. In front of

them, about five feet away, were the tactical and flight stations. A man waring the rank of lieutenant was at Tactical and a female carrying the rank of ensign was at the helm. Rebecca motioned for Eric to follow her which he did. She opened an access port in the floor and proceeded to climb down a ladder, Eric followed not too far behind. As they reached the end of the ladder, Rebecca walked up to a door and activated a device that opened it.

"These are your quarters." She said. "I'll make sure your belongings are brought here as soon as possible."

Eric nodded "And where do you sleep?"

"Two doors down." She ran her fingers through her hair, releasing a knot, as she answered the question. "Let's go meet the captain."

Again she led the way and Eric followed like a little lost puppy. He was clearly overwhelmed with the ship. It was the first time he had been in space; and it was something he was not accustomed to.

As they continued walking down the corridor Eric noted that they hadn't passed any other crew members. "What is this ships compliment and crew?"

"There's six of us altogether." Rebecca replied. "The captain you'll meet in a moment, the officer that was at Tactical is Lieutenant Eugine, the woman next to him is Ensign Johnson. Then there's the Engineer, Lieutenant Jones. And that leaves us to make up the rest of the crew."

Another moment passed and they were standing infront of another door. Eric read a plaque next to the door. "Captain John Andrews, Commanding Officer."

Rebecca knocked on the door. A voice could be heard from inside. "Yes, come on in." The door opened and the couple entered.

An older man worn with age and experience was seated behind a large desk made out of oak. At the moment he was reading over a few typed papers. When he saw Rebecca and Eric he set the papers down on the desk and paid full attention to his officers. "Lieutenant, it's good to see you again. Ensign it's good to meet you."

"Thank you sir." Eric replied.

Andrews nodded, picked up some other papers scanned them; and then looked back to his officers. "Your files are here and in order. Lieutenant report to the bridge, I'll join you shortly."

"Yes sir." Rebecca said as she turned to leave.

He turned his attention to Eric and waited for Rebecca to leave the room. After she did, he broke the silence. "Ensign why are you here?"

"I was drafted sir."

Andrews smiled "Weren't we all." He said it more to himself than to the young ensign that was now part of his crew. John paused. "Some would have you believe they chose the service when in actuality they joined to stay out of prison."

Eric was speechless and confused. "Sir?"

"Watch out for the lieutenant, she isn't what she appears to be." Andrews said with a dark grin. "But I'm sure you'll find that out anyway won't you." He paused again. "Report to the chief engineer. Dismissed."

Eric exited the room in a quick uncertain pace. As he wandered around the corridors looking for engineering he quickly realized that he was lost. Eric knew he should of checked the computer or asked the captain for directions but he wasn't used to doing things that way. After a moment he stopped to rest.

"Ensign is anything wrong?" Rebecca asked as she turned the corner and saw her new friend.

Eric looked up from his shoes into the green eyes of the lieutenant. How beautiful she is. He thought to himself. "Everything's fine I'm just..."

"Lost." Rebecca said finishing his sentence for him. "Yeah I know, come with me I'll show you the way."

A door opened allowing entrance into the engineering section. As Eric entered the room Rebecca didn't follow, she headed back to the bridge. Eric continued to walk further into the room and stopped when he reached the main engine core. As he stood there, Eric started to wonder why he had allowed the government to take him away like they did. He should of ran to Canada, he didn't belong in space. Or at least that's what he thought.

"So. You're my new partner huh?"

Eric turned to see a redhead female approach him. She was carrying some type of diagnostic tool in her hands. From the looks of it she had been in engine grime all day and needed a shower.

"Yeah I guess so. My name's Eric." He replied.

"That's nice." She said clearly not caring. "My name is Cassy, but everyone calls me C.J."

Eric nodded "It's nice to meet you."

C.J. handed Eric the diagnostic scanner she was carrying. "Run a scan on the engine and report back when you're done. I'm going to go get cleaned up." C.J. said and started to walk away. "Oh and Eric."

Eric turned around to see what his supervisor wanted and was hit in the face gently with an article of clothing. "You might want to put that on." He took the newly made, unused engineering jumpsuit off his head and started to change so he could begin his work.

A half hour later C.J. came back to the engineering section in a freshly pressed uniform. Her hair was still wet from her shower. "Report."

Eric was laying on his back underneath a console. "The power grid wasn't hooked up properly and a few other control circuits were burnt to a crisp." He stood up from the deck and handed a computer printout to C.J. "I took the liberty of repairing the systems."

C.J. looked through the paper work checking over what her new staff member had done. After she was finished reading, she let the papers drop to the floor. "Nice work, I'm impressed ensign." She walked over to a computer console and typed up a quick message in her log. C.J. then picked up a small device and put it near her mouth. "Bridge, all systems are go. It looks like your new ensign has passed your test. You may head for Aldeb when ready."

The captain's voice came through a static filled line. "Understood, bridge out."

Eric looked to C.J. with a slight frown. "That was a test?"

C.J. nodded her head. "Yes, we needed to know where your loyalty lies. And you passed with flying colors." She paused, "Now your next job is to get that communications system up to par." She handed Eric another small device and he went to work.

On the bridge the crew member at helm keypinned in the sequence that would take their ship to the front lines in a nearby sector. The ship left Earth orbit at 100,000 Miles Per Hour. All the crew could do was wait to reach the battle ground. On the map it looked close, but in actuality it was a few days away.

## **Chapter Two: The Light of Hope**

Date: August 24, 2095 - 12 Midnight Location: En Route to Space Station Aldeb

Eric walked towards his quarters after his first duty shift aboard the Alaphei. He was tired from a hard day's work, it was more like exhaustion. As he entered his quarters he proceeded to wash his hands and change clothes. Eric picked his suitcase off the floor and emptied the contents into a series of drawers along a wall in his bedroom. He then sat on his bed and allowed his mind to fully relax. Eric looked to the watch on his wrist and checked the time. "She's probably still on duty." He said to himself. Eric laid his back down on the bed and fell asleep. That night, his dreams would be full of his home and the people he missed.

Date: August 25, 2095 - 3 AM Location: En Route to Space Station Aldeb

Eric woke up and looked to his watch. "Only three hours, what the heck is going on!" He stood up and paced around the room trying to figure out why he couldn't sleep. For the past three hours, he kept waking up every hour on the hour. Eric was finding it very difficult to rest, was it because he was in space? Or maybe it was because he was not used to the environment. Whatever the reason he wanted to be able to sleep. Eric walked over to a closet and put his shoes on, he then walked towards the door to his quarters, opened it, and walked out into the corridor. As he turned left he counted the doors. One. Two. "These should be her quarters." He said to himself.

Knock Knock. His hands hit the metal with a loud thud. Eric didn't mean to knock that loud, but from the sound it would wake anyone up.

"I'll be right there." Rebecca's voice came through the door. After a few minutes the door opened and Rebecca was on the other side fully dressed ready for any possible problem. "What's wrong?"

Eric hadn't meant for her to go through the trouble of getting dressed and looking presentable. "Nothing, I just was..."

"Lost again?" She replied in a sarcastic tone when she figured there wasn't an emergency.

Eric shook his head. "Actually, no. I wanted to talk to you."

"Come in." Rebecca replied inviting Eric inside her cabin.

Eric stepped inside the cabin and looked around, it was similar to his in appearance except for the fact that it was a little larger. Actually it was twice the size of his cabin. "Being first officer has its benefits huh?"

Rebecca laughed silently. "Yeah, you could say that. But I'm also the Medic aboard this ship, so I need the extra space for my equipment and supplies." She sat down in a chair. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

Eric also sat down in a chair that was across a table from her. "What were you in for?"

Rebecca was taken back for a moment. She didn't expect that sort of question to come out of thin air, especially from an ensign. "You wake me up at 3 AM and you want to know why I went to prison?" Rebecca put her hands together. "The captain warned you about me, didn't he."

"Yes." Eric said with a poker face.

"All right, you deserve to know the truth." Rebecca said. "I lied when I told you. It was my choice to join. I was drafted like everyone else was. But I didn't want to leave my home, so I headed for the nearest border out of the country and left." She paused allowing the information to sink in the young ensign's head.

"What's so wrong about that?" Eric said, knowing exactly where she was coming from.

"Well the commander in charge of my unit didn't like that very much. He ordered a security squad to track me, hunt me down. When they found me I was put in prison for charges of insurrection."

Eric's mouth dropped open. "That's a little harsh, isn't it?"

Rebecca shook her head. "The Tribunal didn't think so. In fact they thought it was too easy of a punishment." She unclasped her hands and put them on her knees. "They wanted to execute me. I was suppose to be a public example for those who disobey."

"What made them decide the lesser punishment?"

Rebecca smiled. "Captain Andrews came to my defense. He asked for no fee. Only that I would serve aboard his ship. He gave a good argument why I should live and that it isn't the time to be killing people who could be used as soldiers. So they let me live." She stood up and walked over to a table near a window allowing her to look at the stars. "I was placed in Prison Roe 43 and stayed there for a year until the captain came to release me. I became a part of this crew and the rest is yet to be decided."

She turned around to look at Eric. "I'm sorry, did you want something to drink?"

Eric shook his head, he was too interested in her story to be interrupted by a beverage. "So, what happens when this war is over?"

Rebecca smiled. "If I don't die during battle, I will be taken back to the Tribunal and executed. Either way it's a no win situation, at least for me."

Eric stood from his chair. "The captian can do something can't he? He helped you once out of the stockade, he must carry some weight."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, that was one of the stipulations. Once the war is over, I return to Earth and the example will be made so clear that no one will ever think about turning against the government again." She put her head in her hands and started to cry. It had been a long time since the Tribunal gave their final decision in that court. Somehow she had managed to push it to the back of her mind for a few days, and now this ensign was bringing it all up again.

Eric walked over to Rebecca and hugged her, providing limited comfort. "What about your ship? We could escape aboard your shuttle."

Rebecca shook her head, lowerd her left arm and pointed to a scar. "The Tribunal ordered doctors to implant a device in my arm so they could keep their tabs on me. If I do anything against their wishes, they can detinate the device which will send a poison through my veins and I'll die."

"They sure thought of everything."

Rebecca nodded in agreement. "Like I said, it's a no win situation." She was thankful that someone cared about her condition, but she knew that he couldn't do anything for her. As far as she was concerned, her life was over.

"Sorry for taking your precious sleep time." Eric said as he walkd towards the door, opened it, and exited her quarters. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"You mean later today." Rebecca said correcting him.

"Yeah." He replied. "Thanks for your time." Eric walked away and the door closed.

Rebecca leaned on the table as she contemplated the past hour she had spent talking with her friend. "Maybe all is not lost." She said starting to see hope.

## Chapter Three: Ideas

Date: August 30, 2095 Location: Aldeb Sector 56

The Alaphei came to a dead stop in orbit of the United States Main Command Bse near the front lines. Several other vessels were docked at the base waiting for repairs. On the bridge Rebecca was seated at her command station. A moment earlier she had contacted the captain and was now waiting for him to get to the bridge.

Down in the engineering section Eric was hard at work trying to upgrade the ships systems. As the doors opened he didn't even bother to turn to see who it was, he already knew. It had been the same way for the past few days. Eric hadn't been bothered, he was getting use to it.

"Hey there C.J. on time as usual." He said with sarcasm in his voice.

"Morning Eric." C.J. said ignoring his comment. "What ya working on?"

Eric handed C.J. a printout "Look for yourself." He said hoping she would approve and allow him to continue the project.

C.J. was impressed with Eric's work, but decided not to show it. "You're working on an Faster Than Light travel device?" C.J. asked with disbelief in her voice. "We're in a war, not an exploration mission."

Eric frowned at her disapproval. "It's just that it took so long for us to get here, I thought we might be able to get ships here faster if this system worked."

C.J. clearly didn't care what was going on in Erics mind on how he could help out the war effort. "Look, you want to help? Work on a more critical system that we need, like weapons or shields." She took out a lighter from her pocket lit the computer printout on fire, and threw it to the floor allowing it to burn.

Eric watched three days of work go up in smoke. "All right, let's take a look at those weapon systems."

C.J. shook her head. "No time, we are to report to the meeting lounge with the rest of the crew. Captain wants to give us a pep talk."

C.J. and Eric exited the engineering section and headed to the meeting lounge. A moment later they entered a small room that had several chairs facing each other. C.J. and Eric were the last ones to show up for the meeting. As they sat down the captain clasped his hands together tightly.

"Good to see you all made it, we can now get started." Captain Andrews handed out pieces of paper to his crew members. "Here is the current status of the war effort on our side. As you know our country is on the loosing end of this conflict." He paused allowing time for them to absorb the informaiton so his crew might add useful insight to the discussion. "We need to come up with something to increase our force."

Eric started to raise his hand then stopped knowing that C.J. wouldn't like his suggestion.

"You have a comment ensign?" Andrews said noticing Eric's hand movement.

Eric looked to C.J. who shook her head and then back to Andrews. "No sir, I guss I don't."

"Nonsense." Andrews said "Something is going through your mind, I can see those gears turning." He looked to C.J. who he would have to have a talk with later, and then back to Eric. "What is it lad?"

"Well sir" Eric started. "What about designing a FTL travel device? We could integrate it directly into our ships systems and it would increase our range and cut down on travel time."

Andrews thought about it for a moment, "That's a good idea, but it's been tried before with limited resutls. People have died."

Eric nodded. "Yes I know, but I've made some improvements on the original design; and so far it looks promising."

Andrews nodded his approval. "Any other ideas?"

The tactical officer spoke up. "Sir our primary weapon right now is focused laser beams. What about making some kind of missile."

"As you know Tom, the missiles that we have back on earth are too weak for the shield technology of today. They're used for land combat, not for space." Captain Andrew replied. "We might as well be throwing rocks at our enemies."

Tom nodded "Yes sir I know, but I'm talking about something far more powerful than anything we have right now."

Andrews shook his head "I'm not sure if we even have the resources for what you're suggesting. Besides you'd have to develop a delivery system as well which could take months, or even years." He tapped his fingers on his knee. "Is this all you have?"

The room was silent, no more ideas were brought up.

"Very well." The captain said. "I have a meeting with my superiors in a half hour. I'll bring up these ideas to them and see what they have to say." He looked to a watch on his wrist. "Look what time it is. I suggest you all go and get some rest, we have a big day tomorrow. Dismissed." At his command his crew left the meeing lounge to retire for the evening.

## **Chapter Four: A Friend in Need...**

Date: September 1, 2095 Location: Aldeb Sector 56

Rebecca paced around the bridge nervously, she had never been nervous like that in her entire life and it scared her a bit. She couldn't explain why she was nervous, just that she was. Her commanding officer had left his post a day ago and it wasn't the same without him around, to her there appeared to be no order. If she gave an order to the crew, she fully believed that no one trusted her; except Eric of course. Her fears weren't imaginary, it was true no one on the ship trusted her. She couldn't wait to have the captain back.

"Tom, you have the bridge." Rebecca said as she climbed down the latter that gave access to the lower decks.

Tom nodded his head. "Thanks." They wern't going anywhere, she might as well have left him a rubix cube to pass the time.

After Rebecca left the bridge, Tom turned to the helm officer. "So Amy, you doing anything tonight?"

Ensign Johnson turned back to the lieutenant. "Excuse me? Are you asking me out?"

Tom nodded his head. "Yeah."

"And what do you plan on us doing? There isn't much to do on this ship in the middle of nowhere." Amy reminded him.

"Do you play poker?"

She nodded her head.

"Well I happen to have a deck of cards. Meet me in the meeting lounge after your shift is over, and we'll play a few rounds."

She nodded again. "I'd like that."

Down in the engine room, Rebecca sneaked up behind Eric and startled him when she touched his arm to get his attention. He turned around quickly almost dropping a large amount of engine waste to the deck.

"Did I scare you?"

"No." Eric said lying through his teeth. "What's up?"

Rebecca walked around the engine core looking around, making sure they were alone, she didn't want C.J. ease dropping, a talent the engineer had mastered. Once she was certain no one else was in the room she made her way back over to Eric.

"She hasn't arrived for duty yet." Eric said noticing what Rebecca was up to. "She should be here in a half hour."

Rebecca smiled. "Good. We need to talk, but not here." She took the engine waste canister out of Eric's hand and placed it on the floor. Rebecca then took him by the hand and led him out of the engine room. "But first you need to get cleaned up."

Eric nodded "I'll go take a shower. I'll be at your quarters in a few minutes."

"Okay."

Twenty Minutes Later

Knock Knock. Once again Eric's fist hit the door to Rebecca's quarters. This time the knock was much more softer and she was expecting him. The door opened and Eric stepped inside. Rebecca was again on the other side of the door waiting for her friend to arrive.

"You said a few minutes, not twenty." She said playfully scolding him.

Eric laughed. "Sorry, I had a lot of engine grime on me."

They walked over to a couch and sat down turned slightly towards each other for conversation.

"Would you like a drink?" Rebecca asked. "I have water or a water." She had gotten use to only being allowed the most essential items in space, and when it came down to beverages water was the only option available.

Eric jokingly pondered the option for a few minutes. "I think I'll have water." He smiled as she went into the next room to get two bottles of fresh water.

When Rebecca reutrned she handed Eric one bottle and kept the other for herself. He opened it and took a sip. "So, what's up?" He asked in a casual tone.

"The other night, were you serious about helping me?"

Eric nodded. "Of course. I don't want to see anything happen to you." He put a hand on her shoulder showing that he'd be there for her.

Rebecca moved away from his hand. She wasn't used to having friends that close. "Why would you want to help me?" She was confused by the ensign's motive.

"Because you're in distress." Eric replied. "And I don't like to see people in any kind of distress."

Rebecca nodded. "All right. I've been thinking over what you said the other night. We're going to find a way to get out of here when this war is over." She looked down to her arm. "Whether I die by weapons fire on the front line or at home, I don't care." It was time for her to stop worrying about what could happen. It was time to take action.

## **Chapter Five: Goodbyes**

Date: September 3, 2095 Location: Aldeb Sector 56

"Captain's Log. I have just returned from a meeting with Aldeb Sector Command. They have approved our proposal to help out the war effort. My only hope is that we will be successful in our duty."

Once again the meeting lounge was full of the Alapheis' crew. Each of them had been waiting for their captain to return, it hadn't been easy just sitting there in space doing nothing for a few days. As the captain entered, the crew stood up and went to attention. He waved his hand as if to have them sit back down. "At ease." At his command, his crew members sat in their chairs. Andrews remained standing, he didn't want to sit down. John had been sitting in meetings for longer than he wanted to. He looked around the room at the men and women under his command and knew it hadn't been easy for them to wait for his return. He pulled out a few papers from a briefcase and looked them over. "Sector Command has approved Ensign Tompson's idea for FTL travel, but have rejected Tom's proposal for advanced missile technology."

Tom was upset at this news "Why?" He didn't want some ensign who was the friend of a prisoner to show him up. Tom wanted an explanation.

"They don't want the other side to have any chance of getting a hold of the technology and using it against us." The captain responded.

Tom didn't like that answer but he would have to live with it. He lowered his head slightly showing that he had no more questions.

Andrews turned his attention to Eric who was smiling, he was happy command had approved his idea. "Ensign, you will take a shuttle and upgrade its systems for FTL travel." He paused

"Unfortunately the Alaphei will not be going with you, command has ordered us to go to the front lines."

Eric was shocked. "You mean I have to do this alone?"

Andrews nodded "It's your project." He looked around the room. "Unless anyone would like to volunteer to go with him."

The room was silent for a moment, then Rebecca raised her hand. "I'll go with him captain." This could be my chance to get away from them all. She thought to herself.

Andrews shook his head. "No lieutenant, I need you by my side."

C.J. took a deep breath. "I'll probably regret this in the morning. Captain, I'll go with the kid." She looked over to Eric and then back to Andrews. "He'll need someone to talk to."

Andrews nodded. "Very well, gather the necessary supplies you'll need." He looked back to Rebecca who was trying to look like she wasn't bothered by John's decision. "Radio command, tell them we need a new engineer and someone to help out in the engine room."

Rebecca nodded her head. "Yes sir."

"Dismissed." John said. At his command his crew members exited the meeting lounge in single file. "Lieutenant Eugene and Ensign Johnson a word please." Tom and Amy stopped dead in their tracks, turned around, and faced their commanding officer who had a deck of cards in his hand. "I believe these belong to you."

Tom stepped forward took the cards from the captain. "Yes sir."

"Explain yourself." Andrews said.

Amy stepped forward. "We were playing a few games sir. To pass the time."

Andrews shook his head. "Does this look like a game room ensign?" He was clearly angry with his officers.

The helm officer shook her head no.

"That's right, we're in a war. Don't let it happen again." Andrews said in a cold tone.

"Dismissed." They quickly left the lounge to get away from the captain's temper.

Down in the engine room, Eric and C.J. were packing up several devices to take with them on their mission. He was glad that his idea was heard and accepted, but uncertain how C.J. would react away from the ship. She wasn't pleased with his tests in the first place but now she was there to help him out. Was she doing this because she actually cared about Eric or was it because she wanted to get away from the captain. He wasn't sure.

"Looks like we have everything we need." Eric said outloud. "I'll go put these on the shuttle." Taking two large boxes with him, Eric exited the engine room and headed to the airlock where his test shuttle was waiting.

C.J. checked one last time to make sure the engine core was working properly before she left the ship. She didn't want the next engineer to think she did a terrible job keeping the core in working order. After her scans were complete she stared at the core one last time as if to say goodbye. C.J. didn't expect to come back from her mission alive, the captain was right FTL was dangerous. Many people had died from it in the past and here she was trying to help some kid straight from training to test it out again. She walked out the door and continued down the corridor.

Outside an airlock Eric finished loading the last piece of equipment on the shuttle. As he did so C.J. came down the corridor with a scanner in hand. "You forgot my favorite diagnostic scanner." She handed it to him and he placed it with the other equipment.

"Shall we go?" Eric said to the lieutenant.

C.J. shook her head. "Not yet. Don't you think you need to say goodbye to someone first?" She was clearly referring to the fact that Eric hadn't said his goodbyes to Rebecca yet.

Eric nodded his head. "Yeah you're right." He started to walk down the corridor toward Rebecca's quarters. "I'll be right back."

Soon enough he was standing in front of Rebecca's door. He knocked in a soft manner. No response. He knocked again. Still no response. "Where is she?" He asked himself.

"Right here." A voice called from behind. "So you did come to say goodbye." Rebecca said as she turned Eric around to see her.

Eric shook his head. "I don't like goodbyes. They feel too final and closed." He paused. "How about until next time." He held out a hand.

"A handshake's not going to do it for me." Rebecca said as she gave Eric a hug.

Eric wished that moment could go on for an indefinite period of time, but that wasn't possible. He would have to let go and get started with his mission leaving the one he cared about behind. "The quicker I go, the quicker I'll return." He said still not wanting to let go, but he did anyway.

"All right." Rebecca said. "Take care of yourself."

Eric nodded his head, turned, and headed back down the corridor that would take him to the shuttle.

As Eric entered the shuttle, C.J. was in the left pilot chair ready to disengage the docking clamps and get underway. "You ready?"

Eric closed the door and sealed the airlock. "Yes." He sat down in the right pilot chair next to C.J. and contacted the bridge. "Bridge, we're ready to disembark."

Through a crystal clear communications channel Andrews responded. "Understood, releasing docking clamps."

Eric could hear the clamps being released from inside the cockpit. "We're clear Alaphei."

"You're clear to leave." The captain continued. "I might suggest you head towards the Comel system; it's far enough away from the front lines for your project. Good luck, Alaphei out."

Eric watched out the window as the Alaphei moved farther away from the shuttle and headed towards the front lines where the battle was taking place. Now they were on their own, no more outside contact from vessels, they were to be under strict radio silence. No one could know about their location or project. Eric wondered how long it would take him to make the FTL system work.

"Let's get under way." C.J. said as she pressed a few buttons that would fire the shuttles manuvering thrusters.

Eric watched outside as everything moved at a slow pace. It would take at least three weeks to get to Comel. Three weeks that he hoped he could handle away from his friend.

## Chapter Six: Testing

Date: September 24, 2095 Location: Comel System

"Engineer's Log. We have arrived at the Comel System after a long three weeks. Because of the movement of the shuttle we haven't been able to begin our project until we came to a dead stop. From the looks of it, this region of space is void of anything, there are no planets in view or stations, it looks like a good place for nothing." C.J. said as she completed her offiical entry for the day.

Eric started to unpack the equipment they would need for the job. "You know, I'm glad you decided to come along." He said as he handed C.J. a diagnostic scanner. "With your help this should go smoothly."

C.J. gave a slight nod of her head. "That's good." She didn't really care about Eric or what reasons she had come. She had a mission to complete and was prepared to complete that mission at all costs.

Eric looked to C.J. "You don't have a lighter by chance, do you?"

C.J. checked her pockets. "No. Sorry I'm fresh out." She continued to check her pockets and pulled out a match. "I have a match though." She lit the match and held it towards Eric expecting him to light a cigarette.

Eric blew the match out. "Good."

C.J. had a puzzled look on her face. "Why did you do that? That was my last match!"

Eric pulled out a long computer printout. "Didn't want you burn this. Couldn't take the chance, it's my last copy." He handed the paper to C.J. and smiled. "You should recognize it."

C.J. scanned the paper for a second and recognized it immediately. "You printed up another copy of your experiment after I ordered you to stop?!" She paused waiting for an explanation.

Eric shook his head. "No, actually I printed up two copies and only gave you one of them incase you decided to destroy it. Which you did." He took the paper back from her so she wouldn't do something to that copy. Although he doubted it. C.J. promised the captain that she would assist him in making the FTL device work.

"Let's get this thing started." C.J. said in a cold tone. "I want to get back to the front lines as soon as possible."

"What, so you can be blown away?" Eric replied. "I want to stay far away from the war zone, I don't want to die young."

C.J. laughed. "That's life when it comes to war kid. Death waits for no one in war, you get shot you die." She paused. "Keep in mind that we are to be under strict radio silence, no one is to know about this project."

Eric nodded. "I remember the briefing the captain gave us." He paused. "Don't worry, you can trust me."

C.J. laughed silently to herself. "Just don't get an urge to call up your friend. I know how close you two are."

Eric nodded again. "Don't worry about me." He picked up a few devices and started to modify the shuttle for FTL travel, a task that would take another two weeks to complete.

Date: October 9, 2095 Location: Comel System

Eric was just finishing up his project tightening the last few screws as it were. He wanted everything to work smoothly. The experiment was still highly dangerous even though he made modifications to the unit, someone could still get hurt.

"You ready?" C.J. asked impatiently.

"Just a few more diagnostic tests." Eric replied. "I don't want this thing blowing up in our faces." He continued to check the system for errors that he had missed.

"Enough!" C.J. said even more impatiently. "We will test it now."

Eric looked up from what he was doing. "I said I'm not ready yet." He turned his head back to his work.

C.J. walked up to the front of the cabin and opened up a storage locker, inside was a gun. As she pulled the gun out of the locker, C.J. walked back over to Eric who was facing the FTL device. Click. The gun was cocked and ready to fire. "I said let's begin the test."

Eric felt the gun against his head and slowly turned around. "What's this all about?" He dropped a device he held in his hand to the deck.

"Oh nothing really." C.J. continued "I had my orders, and you can't interfere with those orders. Now step aside."

Eric stood from the deck. "Orders... What orders?"

"The ones you didn't know about." C.J. said as she guided Eric to one of the pilot chairs and strapped him in so he couldn't move. She moved back to the FTL device and pressed a few buttons.

"I doubt Captain Andrews would order you to do this." Eric said with a hint of anger to his voice.

"I don't work for Andrews." C.J. replied, "At least not anymore." She continued to flip a few more switches. "All right the drive's on line and ready to go." As she walked back up to the front, she put the gun down on a console. "There's a ship waiting for us not too far from here." C.J. sat down at the other pilot chair and activated the launch sequence.

Nothing.

"What's wrong?!" C.J. asked. "Why won't it work?"

Eric laughed. "You didn't enter in the code sequence. I didn't want anyone tampering with it."

"You didn't trust me?" C.J. inquired.

"No I trusted you completely." Eric said. "I always put in a code sequence when I program something. Just a simple safety precaution."

She picked the gun back up. "Don't forget, I'm the one in control. Enter the code and activate the sequence."

Eric shook his head. "I know you too well by now C.J. you won't fire that weapon, release me and we can talk it over." He tried to unloosen the restraining cords with no success.

C.J. was getting more angry by the minute. "I gave you an order. You will obey."

"I don't take orders from you anymore traitor." Eric said. "You're an engineer get it working by yourself."

C.J. started to pace around the shuttle, what was she going to do. She didn't want to be ordered around by a lowly ensign. She could fire the weapon, but that wouldn't do much she could use him later on. C.J. stopped pacing around, lowered her weapon, and moved back towards the FTL device. "All right, this can't be too hard." She said to herself. C.J. started to tinker with the controls for a while. After ten minutes had passed she began to smile. "Got it." She pressed a few more buttons which allowed her to control the craft from the aft section of the shuttle. "Firing FTL thrusters."

The drive began its prefire sequence and then began to travel at high speed. "It's working!" C.J. said. Her rejoicing was a little early however, before she knew it the ship stopped completely. An explosion erupted throwing C.J. to the front of the cockpit.

## Chapter Seven: Message

Date: October 9, 2095 Location: Outside of the Comel System

During the chaos, the restraining cords holding Eric down were loosened. He ran directly to the back of the shuttle and put out a small fire. Eric then checked the shuttle's systems for damage. The FTL device was partially on-line. After taking the FTL device completely off-line, he checked the rest of the shuttle's systems. There were no other problems with the ship, she was still space worthy. "All right." Eric said as he walked over to C.J. Her body was burned from head to toe, she didn't survive the incident.

Eric picked up the gun C.J. had been carrying and set it back in the storage locker. "No more violence for today." Eric said to himself as he sat down in the left pilot chair. He set a course back for the Comel System and fired the main thrusters.

Eric searched C.J.'s body for any type of equipment the other side could be using to gain information about his vessel but found nothing. He placed her body in a black bag and put it in the lower hold.

Eric made his way back up to the top deck and sat back down at the left pilot station. He pressed a few buttons on the console which activated a recording device. "Shuttle Riko Log Entry, Ensign Eric Tompson reporting. C.J. is dead, she tried to overtake this shuttle and deliver us into, what I assume would be, the enemies hand. I am now heading back towards the Comel System to complete testing. The drive is off-line for now, it was damaged but should be repairable. I plan on sending an encrypted message to the Alaphei, hopefully the other side won't pick it up. I realize that I am violating my orders of radio silence, but I don't care." Eric said into the recording device before deactivating it.

Eric typed a quick message to the Alaphei and sent it using a specific encryption system. "I hope she understands this." He said as he accessed the system that would send his message.

## Chapter Eight: Intercept

Date: October 12, 2095 Location: Front Lines

Rebecca sat alone in her quarters, it had been a long day. Too long. She had to reset five broken bones on four different crewmembers of another vessel. Their medical officer was dead, and it was up to her to patch them up, a task she didn't care too much about. Rebecca was trying to relax for the evening. At the moment the battle seemed to be quiet, the enemy was in retreat, but that wouldn't last long. They would be back. Rebecca stood from her couch, walked over to a computer console and sat down. She had to organize her files for the day.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Rebecca pressed a button on her console to check the time. The clock read Four AM. What is with people bothering me at odd times? She thought to herself. "I'll be right there!" Rebecca stood from the console and walked to the door, as she opened it she went to attention.

"Captain sir."

"At ease." Andrews said.

"Please come in." Rebecca said inviting her commanding officer in with a wave of her hand.

Andrews shook his head. "I won't be long." He handed Rebecca a computer printout. "We intercepted this message headed for your quarters."

Rebecca took the printout. "Sir?"

Andrews smiled. "It appears that our engineer wasn't who she appeared to be." He tapped his fingers against his leg. "I want you to go retrieve him. Help Eric finish the project and report back."

Rebecca nodded her head. "Understood. When do I leave?" She folded the paper in half intending to read it later.

"As soon as you get back in uniform." Andrews said as he turned around to go. "And lieutenant. Everything I've said about you is wrong. I'm sorry." With that, he walked down the corridor heading back to the bridge.

As soon as the door closed, Rebecca read through the message that Eric had sent. It wasn't too long of a message, mostly alpha numerical code that the captain had taken the liberty to decode for her. "I'm coming Eric." She said as she moved towards her closet to get ready for her mission.

## Chapter Nine: Come Here Often?

Date: November 10, 2095 Location: Comel System

Eric sat in the shuttle alone waiting for his friend to arrive. "I hope she was able to decode that message." He said to himself. Eric picked up the diagnostic scanner that was C.J.'s favorite and scanned the FTL drive. It was stable after several days of work on it. Eric had managed to get the drive back up to 100% operating efficiency. He was tempted to test the device out properly but decided against it. Eric wanted to make certain Rebecca would be there for the first trial run.

Date: November 15, 2095 Location: Comel System

Another day had passed and Eric was still waiting. "Shuttle Riko Log Entry. It has been a while since I sent that message to Rebecca. I haven't received a response back from her, I hope she's all right. The FTL device is working again, I've run preliminary tests several and it all works in theory. I've decided that if she doesn't get here by tomorrow..." He stopped his recording as the Shuttle Riko shifted position by an inch. "What was that?" Eric said out loud. He looked out the window and saw Rebecca's shuttle next to the Riko. Rebecca didn't waste time contacting him, she docked immediately.

Eric stood from his chair and walked back to the airlock. He pressed a few buttons allowing oxygen to fill the space. After the airlock was completely pressurized the door opened allowing Eric access. As he made his way towards Rebecca's shuttle a smile formed on his face. He couldn't wait to see her face.

The door opened and Rebecca came out acting as if they had seen each other only a day ago. "Come here often?" Rebecca said as she reached out to give Eric a hug.

Eric's smile grew. "You got my message after all." He let go to allow Rebecca some room to explain.

"Yes, sorry I'm late." She replied. "I was caught up for a few days in an ion storm." Rebecca looked around the shuttle. "You don't have much room here, do you."

Eric shook his head. "No." He looked around the room as well. "But I'm not the first officer of the Alaphei either."

"Yeah, that's right." She said with a slight laugh. Rebecca then turned to serious mode. "Where's her body?"

Eric pointed to the floor. "I put her in the cargo hold." He turned around and opened a panel on the floor allowing access to the hold. Eric then proceeded to climb down a ladder, Rebecca followed him.

The lower cargo hold was cold and dark. It was used mostly for transporting pieces of equipment and other essential items for the shuttle and a space vessel. As the couple moved through the hold, Eric led Rebecca towards a bag.

"I lowered the temperature so her body would be preserved." Eric said explaining why the hold's environment was not set at the usual seventy-five degrees.

Rebecca nodded her head. "Understood." She opened the bag up and examined C.J.'s body visually. "She really got it didn't she. Burned to death, not a pretty site." Rebecca opened a small pocket on her uniform, pulled out a medical scanner, and placed it on C.J.'s arm. "This will scan her for anything you may have missed when you searched her for a bug."

Eric shot Rebecca a look. "How did you know I searched her?"

Rebecca smiled. "Because that's what I would of done in your shoes. You're an ensign but you're not dumb." A few minutes passed and the scanner completed its task. "Nothing else, looks like she's clean." The scanner started to beep. "Wait a minute." Rebecca said.

"What is it?"

"The scanner almost skipped over it." She pressed a few buttons. "Remember that device in my arm?"

Eric nodded his head.

"I'm not the only one who had one aboard the Alaphei." Rebecca said.

"You mean she was a convict?" Eric asked with disbelief.

Rebecca nodded. "Yes." She took out another device and scanned C.J.'s arm further. "The explosion wasn't the only thing that caused her death. The Tribunal must have activated her device causing the poison to flow. Or someone else might have done it."

"Someone else?" Eric asked.

"You did say that she was working for the other side." Rebecca said. "It's only logical that she found someway to override the controls on the device and deleted her file from the Tribunal's computer giving full control to the enemy."

Eric lowered his head. "Oh." He tried to figure out why C.J. would turn sides but couldn't think of anything. "We'd better get on with our mission." He said walking towards the ladder. Rebecca put her medical instruments away, closed the body bag, and followed Eric to the upper level.

Once they were back on the top level of the shuttle, Rebecca walked over to the airlock and closed the door allowing the two vessels to be separated. "Okay, we're ready to get underway." She said as they walked up towards the front section. Eric sat down in the right pilot console and Rebecca sat next to him.

"No slip ups this time." Eric said as he held out his left hand.

Rebecca grasped Eric's hand with a firm grip. "Agreed." She accessed a few controls and the FTL drive came on-line again. "Looks like all systems are go."

Eric nodded his head. "The drive is stable, just sit back and enjoy the ride." He accessed a file in the computer that would allow the FTL drive to work properly and typed in the code sequence." The computer beeped slightly as it recognized the code. He fired the FTL thrusters and the shuttle flew by at speeds only imagined. The ship was rocking left and right, Eric was barely able to speak. "Maybe I should of added seat cushions!"

Rebecca laughed outloud as she checked their speed. "This is increadible! The drive is working."

"All right. We've proven the drive works, I'm bringing us out of whatever we are in." He pressed a few more buttons and the drive disengaged bringing the ship to a gentle stop. "That wasn't too bad." Eric said. "How far away are we?"

Rebecca checked her console. "If we were to head back towards Earth, it would take us about two and a half years." She smiled, "We've traveled a great distance in only a small amount of time."

"We should take some readings of this sector." Eric said. "No one's ever been out this far."

Rebecca shook her head. "I have strict orders to report back to Earth orbit as soon as possible. Captain wants to begin mass production of this." She looked into Eric's eyes that were begging like a little puppy. "Oh all right, take a passive scan of that planet." Rebecca said as she pointed to a planet out the window.

Eric pressed a few buttons and scanned a nearby planet. "That planet is full of ice." He said as the primary scans came back. "It looks like a highly advanced society... Wait a second, something's launching from the planet."

A small device from the planets surface made its way closer to the shuttle and stopped a short distance in front of the ships nose. Eric keyed in a few more sequences that extended an arm from the shuttle to the device. The arm clasped the device and brought it back to the shuttle. "I have it in the hold." He said wanting to investigate more, but that would be impossible. "All right, we can go now."

"Comming about 180 degrees." Rebecca said as she turned the ship around and fired the FTL thrusters to take them back to earth.

## **Chapter Ten: Time Away**

Date: November 15, 2100 Location: Comel System

"Captain's Log. We have decided to end the search for the shuttle carrying Ensign Eric Tompson and Lieutenant Rebecca Finlinson. The war has been over for two years now and it is time for me and my crew to move on with other sections of exploration. The Alaphei won't be the same without the two of them. I am now officially declaring the Comel System open for travel, it is no longer off limits." Captain Andrews said as he made his log entry for the day.

Andrews looked around his bridge for a moment. It was time for his crew to go back home. "Set a course for Earth orbit, let's get out of here."

"Sir." Tom said. "What about Rebecca's shuttle?"

Andrews looked out a window, sure enough Rebecca's shuttle was still sitting there. He had ordered the ship to stay there for the past five years, John didn't want anyone to move it. "It was part of the investigation." He said. "But it isn't needed anymore, destroy it."

"She wouldn't want you to do that sir." Tom said. "And you know it."

Andrews nodded his head. "Yes, you're right." He paced around the bridge for a moment more. "Close in and bring it into the lower hanger deck. After that's complete, head towards Earth, best possible speed."

"Aye sir." The flight officer said.

Outside the Alaphei moved closer to Rebecca's shuttle and stopped directly above it. The hanger door opened as two arms grabbed the shuttle and brought it aboard. Once the shuttle was aboard the Alaphei moved out of the Comel System and headed towards home.

## **Chapter Eleven: No Welcome Back?**

Date: December 2, 2100 Location: Earth orbit

The shuttle carrying Eric and Rebecca came out of FTL travel and sat motionless in space for a few minutes one thousand feet away from Earth. Inside the shuttle Eric and Rebecca smiled at each other.

"Welcome home to the big blue marble." Eric said to Rebecca as he gazed down through the window at the Earth.

Rebecca continued to smile. "What a beautiful sight."

Eric activated a communications channel. "This is the Shuttle Riko to Command Base." He waited for a response that would never come.

Rebecca looked to Eric "What's wrong?"

Eric shrugged his shoulders "I'm not sure." He activated the communications system again. "I repeat, this is the Shuttle Riko to Command Base. Please respond."

The computer console in front of Rebecca started to beep out of control. Several readouts came from the computer's print out screen faster than she could grab it all. She tried to read the paper as fast and as accurately as she could. After a few more minutes, she finally understood what was happening. "We're emitting some kind of radiation pulse directly towards the planet. All of Earth's population will be destroyed in a manner of minutes!"

Eric was puzzled. "How is that possible?" He cocked his head back a moment to look at another readout, "That device we picked up is interacting negatively with the FTL drive, I've got to jettison it." He pressed a few buttons which opened the lower hold. C.J.'s body and the small alien device was floating out in open space.

Another alarm sounded. "That didn't help, the inner core is being destroyed layer by layer. There's nothing we can do!" Rebecca reported over the alarm.

Outside the shuttle's windows, Rebecca and Eric watched as the earth continued to decay until it finally melted down. Nothing was left of the planet once known as Earth.

## Epilogue

Date: December 6, 2162 Location: Old Earth Orbit, Space Station Beta

"...And that's how the Earth ended." Eric said as he was finishing up the story to his grandson. John sat there motionless not knowing what to say.

"Rebecca," Eric continued. "Later found out that the FTL device had taken us five years ahead of everyone else. Your grandmother sure was a smart cookie." He stood from his chair, walked over to a bookshelf and picked up a picture of Rebecca. Eric stared at that picture for a long time. "A few weeks after we got back, the Alaphei returned and Captain Andrews filled us in on all of the things we had missed over the past five years. Fortunately we won the war." He paused. "We were debriefed and ordered not to tell anyone about what had happened. How we had destroyed Earth." Eric walked back over to the chair and sat down. Tears began to flow from his eyes.

John took a white cloth from his pocket and handed it to his grandfather. "I'm so sorry grandpa."

"A year passed. Rebecca and I were married." Eric said. "A few months later the Tribunal decided to activate that murder device in Rebecca's arm." Eric continued. "They couldn't do it though, she was carrying a child at the time. So they waited until your mother was born. I lost my precious wife that day." He paused. "And soon they'll be coming for me."

John still sat there speechless. "There must be some way to get around this."

Eric shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not." He paused. "Will you do something for me?"

John nodded his head. "Anything."

Eric stood again and walked over to the wall where his safe was. He opened it up and took out the alien device they had retrieved from the Ice Planet sixty-two years ago. "We were wrong, this device had nothing to do with what happened." Eric handed the device to John.

John examined the device for a moment. It had several strange markings on it he didn't understand. As he turned it over three words in plain english were written. Please come back. John looked to Eric with a question on his face.

"I want you to travel back to the Ice Planet John." Eric said. "Find out why they wanted us to travel back to their planet." He looked at his watch. "Now I really don't have much time, only a few seconds. Listen to me carefully."

John nodded his head.

"Use this room for your research, all of my technical diarys are here." He paused. "You should find them most useful. Rebecca's original shuttle is here as well. I don't have time to show you where it is, but it's here believe me." His breath started to get more heavy. Eric looked down to his arm where a scar was. "The drug is beginning to disipate throughout my body just like it did Rebecca's." He fell from the chair and squeezed a rug on the floor in pain. "I love you, take care..." Another second passed and Eric was gone.

John knelt down near his grandfather and checked his pulse. Sure enough he was dead.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

John lifted the chair cushion and placed the alien device and the device that recorded Eric's last words underneath it. He then walked back to the door and opened it. "Yes?"

A man and a woman in black uniforms were standing in the hallway the man one spoke. "We have come for Eric's body."

"Who are you?"

The female pulled a badge out of her jacket. "We're from the Tribunal."

John nodded his head and allowed them to enter the room. Once inside, they walked over to Eric's body and knelt down beside him. The man pulled out a medical scanner and put it on Eric's head. "It's confirmed, total brain damage."

The woman smiled. "Good. Let's get him out of here." She lifted Eric's legs and the man lifted Eric's arms. As they were moving towards the door the woman spoke again. "What did he tell you?"

John shook his head. "Nothing."

"Are you lying." The man asked. "Because if you are we'll be back for you."

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John denied everything. "No, he didn't tell me a thing."

The couple nodded to each other and left the room. They continued down the hallway towards the hanger bay where a vessel was waiting for them. John watched them go knowing that he had a job to complete.

End of Part One