

Sacrifice

McKenzie Sanker (2023)

July 29th 2053 ...

The mission wasn't supposed to end this way—death, mayhem, heartbreak. They weren't supposed to die. They weren't supposed to leave me. My heart feels like it's been stabbed a million times over; I shouldn't have left Colby there. Death will consume him too. There were four of us, now only I remain.

August 6th 2055 ...

The traumatic visions that have tortured me for the past two years danced before my eyes; death, blood, war. The grief crept up my throat, strangling me, paralysing me, as I stumbled, inconsolable, into the Chief's office at NASA. Guilt and pain were entwined together in my heart, creating a deep throb, reminding me of my mistake, of Colby's sacrifice. My sobs filled the intimidating, formal room. The unwelcoming glances sent my way were as cold as icicles. 'I ... I ...'

'Aria, what's wrong? Where are Colby, Eden and Chase?' snapped one of the executives.

'Gone,' is the only word I successfully choked out.

Turning as pale as a ghost, the Chief quickly shifted towards me.

'Now, Aria, tell us what happened ...'

The humans on Earth were vultures. Carelessly stripping the planet of its precious natural resources. Ignorant to the consequences. After telescope technology advanced, the Chief located a small, healthy planet orbiting between Mars and Jupiter. Awaiting to be discovered ... or so we thought ...

'Chase, Aria, Colby, look, we're finally here!' said Eden.

*Our sophisticated spacecraft suddenly flew over a land covered in lush vegetation:
Planet Stellar.*

'This place might be our saviour,' said Chase.

Gliding slowly through dense vegetation, we were all mesmerised, like little kids. A sparkling river glistened in the sun, dividing the lush, evergreen land in two. The picturesque landscape was blanketed with mist that floated around the trees. Our breaths hitched as the flora opened to reveal a city that transfixed us. The place was highly developed, and technology controlled every aspect; infrastructure, such as houses and buildings, was raised in the air. A flying car suddenly whizzed past, scaring us to death, and we were blinded by the incredibly powerful lights.

Cautiously, Colby landed on the edge of the fascinating city, and we tentatively stepped out onto the concrete pavement.

'Come on, we must explore,' said Eden.

After what felt like a thousand years, we finally encountered what would forever change us, what created the excruciating ache in my heart, what turned me into this distant, suffering woman. They were unbelievably advanced. Half-human, half-robot. A specimen with intelligence like no other. They didn't speak. They showed no emotion. Their crystalised eyes pierced me, making me feel like I was being examined under a microscope with someone staring straight into my soul. Abnormally tall and clean-shaven, the species towered over us. Hidden under assassin-black clothes were their incredible robotic limbs, which extended and clutched our hands. Fascination and intimidation were laced together within my stomach, enabling a deep pit to form. Continuing to stare at the foreign creatures, my knuckles whitened as I gripped my ordinary gun tighter.

'It was the calm before the storm. They ... they... were friendly, not hostile, when we encountered them. We thought they would help!' I screeched.

'Your stupidity and neglect to consider what that half-robot, half-human species really thought of you, has resulted in the death of three of our best astronauts,' shouted the Chief, slamming his fist down onto the table, face turning red.

'This is all your fault, Aria. You should have known when they didn't want to negotiate. Think about that,' yelled one of the executives.

I slowly curled into the foetal position, my body trembling. Maybe, they're right. Maybe, this is all my fault, I thought, feeling completely isolated and alone.

‘They were like black panthers. We were their prey. They stalked us, ambushed us, so we couldn’t fight back,’ I murmured.

After exploring the flourishing planet for three days and finding a healthy supply of natural resources, we decided to stay and try to share this glorious planet with the advanced humans. But, when we tried, a sinister feeling crawled through my body. Colby, Eden and Chase said it was nothing, said I was probably fatigued or dehydrated and not thinking straight. I listened to them and that’s what cost us everything.

We meandered through the woodland, peaceful, and calm, until we heard the crack of a branch.

‘What was that?’ whispered Chase.

My skin turned cold and clammy, and my heart began to race as fast as a speeding car. The bone-chilling terror caused me to tremble. What was going to happen?

Suddenly, we heard the roar of the developed humans and turned to see them dashing towards us with numerous laser weapons and arrows. We quickly grasped each other’s hands and sprinted through the darkness of the forest. We were outnumbered, four to twelve.

Panic churned inside me. What were we going to do? I rapidly wiped the sweat from my glasses as we dragged each other through the forest, diving behind trees and bushes, to dodge the powerful red lasers. I didn’t know whether we were going to live or die. My ears rang as the sound of our bullets echoed throughout the night. Bang. Bang. Bang.

I heard a menacing voice in my ear. ‘You think you can kill us, little girl? This is our land, not yours. You must all die.’

My hands shook as I rapidly aimed my weapon at the developed human’s crystalised eye and pulled the trigger—he fell. The computer-operated element of his brain had stopped. The smell of blood filled my nostrils.

He was dead.

‘Shoot them in the eyes,’ I shouted. ‘That’s the only way to kill them.’

Suddenly, a scream of anguish ripped from my throat as I saw an arrow slice through Eden’s skin. Her body shuttered before exploding into a million pieces.

‘No ... No ...’ I shrieked.

'Aria, we must go now,' said Chase and Colby simultaneously.

I sighed in relief as our spacecraft came into view, but as we sprinted towards it, Chase staggered and fell to the ground. A red laser continuously sliced through his skin. His breathing became shallow, and blood poured from his massive chest wounds.

I shrieked in terror as Colby pushed me out of line from the laser and fired. There were four of them and two of us.

The air began to fade, and shivers racked my body. We were going to die. I felt like I was suffocating. The ringing in my ears intensified and nausea crept into my throat.

My eyes were tormented by the sea of crimson and mangled flesh splattered everywhere around me.

Colby hastily shoved me towards the spacecraft. Our eyes met; no words were spoken. We both knew what was going to happen. A river of tears slowly streamed down my face. As an arrow shattered the window, Colby screamed at me to go. He threw a grenade and continued to fight, but before long he was swarmed by the advanced humans. As I started the long journey back to Earth, I knew I would never recover.

'You're such a coward, Aria. You did this. You're responsible for their deaths,' bellowed the Chief, his jaw clenched in rage, his glare infuriated.

'What was I supposed to do? They were dead and I couldn't save them from those merciless species. We were outnumbered,' I said.

Racing outside, I shivered as the chilly wind encountered my skin. I tasted the saltiness of my tears and gasped for air as my knees buckled, hitting the cold, concrete pavement. There was silence. No laughter, no sunshine, just unforgiving silence and a bleak, cloudy sky glaring down at me. I didn't know how I was going to live with myself. I will forever be plagued by hidden scars. Broken and bruised.