

“When the needle touches your skin” Evelyn Bieniawski

The warm air rushed up my face as our Z-boards zoomed across the vast, dry desert. It was a sea of hills and mounds of brown golden sand, but as beautiful as the sand was, it was a depressing place, with few plants, and when you saw one it would be brown and dead. The sand flew up behind us like cars on a racetrack. The massive hovercraft started to emerge through the clouds of dust and it finally started coming into view,

“Speed up Astrid! The hover craft is not going to wait for us, and we’re almost there!”

“I know mom! I’m trying to go fast! My Z-board is very old!”

I slowly leaned forward urging it to go faster but it wouldn't budge,

“Ughh, Come on! Come on!” I yelled at my Z-board.

Suddenly, it beeped as if trying to respond to me, and abruptly came to a dead stop. It flung me off and I landed in a poof of sand.

“Oh, really!” I yelled at it, and then as if it was almost dying, my Z-board slowly sank to the ground.

“You’re going to have to run Astrid! If we miss the hovercraft the Ezrala will surely take us, just like they took you father!”

I sighed, hauled myself off the ground, wiped my freckled face and boney legs free of sand, and took off.

With every leap my legs grew more tired, my feet sank deeper into the sand, and I longed for a breath of cold air. When I finally reached my mom, I was gasping for air. She lifted me up onto her Z-board and I looked back to see a puff of smoke where my Z-board had crashed.

As we approached the hovercraft, I could faintly hear a slight beep and then a low voice, I guessed it was a loud speaker announcing something on the hovercraft. But as I listed closer, I could make out what it was saying, “Attention everyone, the doors will be closing in approximately 60 seconds.” My stomach lurched and my mom leaned so far forward that I was afraid she was going to fall over. Fortunately, we were only about 50 yards away from the large domed doors that marked the entrance to the hovercraft. I knew we were going to make it, we had to! I clutched on to my mom’s back and we zoomed even closer, 40 yards, 30 yards, but then as we approached the 20 yard point another horrifying announcement boomed from the hovercraft, “The doors will now be closing in 3...2...1....”

“We have jump!” my mom yelled back at me, “Or we’re not going to make it! 3....”

“There’s no time to count! NOW!”

And we jumped.

Even though we had made it to the 5-yard point, it was still the jump of my life time. We both hurdled off the Z- board, dived down and slid under the doors just in the nick of time.

We both hit a rough black carpet that marked the entrance to the hovercraft, The cool air-conditioned insides overwhelmed me with smells of freshly made plastic and newly built metals instead of the smell of the dry and hot desert. I looked around to see the tall black and white walls of the hover craft. What I guessed was the first level of the hovercraft was a vast area, with many people talking, what looked like a galley, with many people sitting and eating, and a stairway that went up to the second level of the hovercraft. My mom and I turned our heads to look at each other with the biggest smiles on our faces, we had made it! Our elbows and knees were a little scraped up from sliding under the doors, but we did it!

Only then my mom's Z-board crashed against the already-closed doors, echoing a loud bang across the whole hovercraft, and sending everybody's gaze directly on us. We were quite the sight to see, but surprisingly most people took one glance towards us and then just looked away. However, one girl, who looked a little younger than me, skipped towards us and reached her hand out to help me up. She had a happy, flowery look about her and she smiled a bright smile. I took her hand and she pulled me up, followed by my mom who shakily hoisted herself off the ground.

“Hi, I’m Cassie!” she said cheerily, while twirling her flouncy yellow dress, “What's your name?”

“Oh, um... hi,” I muttered “My name is Astrid.”

“That is such a cool name!” she replied in a bubbly manner, “It's like something from space! I really like it!

“Th-thanks I like yours too.” I replied awkwardly.

I was surprised by how ecstatic she was in these times, Fortunately, our awkward conversation was forced to halt when another loud beep echoed through the hovercraft to mark the incoming of an announcement.

"Hello Everybody! Welcome to the Zahid 120! My name is Shaun and I will be your pilot while we are traveling from your home planet of Adesina to a new planet called Halaptacoas! Halaptacoas will be free of the Ezrala, and should cause you no fear. The flight will be exactly 13 days long, so you will be provided with cabins, and their numbers should be popping up on your uix-watches in about 3 minutes. Now, these emergency procedures are very important, if there

happens to be an infected person of the Ezrala army please stay calm and proceed to the Ezrala antidote room, it is located on floor 2, room 16. The antidote will be in a blue spray bottle that is stocked on the shelves of those rooms. To use them just spray one squirt at the needle they hold, and the needle will disappear from the Ezrala's hands, but it will take an hour for them to change back to normal. Please forgive me if I have scared you because there is really nothing to worry about. So, feel free to roam around the aircraft as much as you would like and enjoy the ride."

A slight murmur of voices cascaded through the lobby, followed by frightened looks, and uneasy conversations. I glanced over to look at Cassie, in the hope that she could be the happy ray of sunshine to brighten up the dark raincloud that had fallen over the hovercraft. But, in my despair, as I looked over, she was even more depressed than most. Her bright yellow dress appeared to have become stiff, her eyes faced toward the ground, and all her bubbly happiness had washed away.

"Hey, are you okay?" I asked her "You seem sad"

"Yeah, I guess so.." she replied, not sounding okay at all, "I just don't really understand this whole thing about the Ezrala, I mean...the people in their army don't want to be there, but they are, and-and they're our friends and they're family."

She sighed,

"On the way to the hovercraft my mom started saying things like, 'join our army', and 'when the needle touches your skin' I was terrified, and suddenly, she turned all white and zombie like, and was trying to give us some shot. My daddy pushed me out of the car, and we had to run the rest of the way."

I could tell Cassie was on the verge of tears now, she was talking so fast I couldn't understand anything she was saying. I calmed her down and told her everything was going to be okay, I said that everyone had to go through those hard things, even me.

By then our uix-watches started beeping wildly about our room number, so I headed over to my mom and we made our way to the stairway. Our room was on floor 2, room 11. I hurried up the staircase eager to see what it would be like followed by my mom. When we got there I opened the door. The room was quite quant with yellow walls two beds, and a bathroom. We both layed down tiredly on the comfy beds and quickly fell asleep. It felt like everything was going to be okay.

My eyes fluttered open as I awoke, my stomach was queasy and I had so much fear that a person of the Ezrala would be roaming around the hovercraft, but in my fear, I glanced over to look at my mom's bed, noticing that she was not there.

"Mom!" I hollered, I got no answer but as I looked closer there was a note on her bed;

At the Galley-Mom

I stumbled out of bed on a lame journey to make it to the galley, opened the door, passed the antidote room, and hastily stepped down the stairs, as I started to see the galley, I could see my mom sitting there next to another person. As I walked closer though, it started to seem like it was Cassie sitting there, but when I finally make it to my mom, she greeted me with a hug and I realized that the person she was sitting with was Cassie's dad.

"Hi! My name is Jake! I don't know if you've met my daughter Cassie, but she looks about the same age as you."

"Oh yeah," I replied, "I've met Cassie."

"Cool," he said cheerily, "Well, your mom and I were just talking about your father, and, well, Cassie's mother."

It was like I couldn't get away from it, all this talk about the Ezrala. I guessed I had dazed off because my mom quietly whispered "Astrid!" into my ear and I stopped.

"Oh, well, um, do you know where Cassie is?" I asked desperately trying to change the subject,

"Yeah!" he replied happily, "I think I just saw--"

Suddenly, his eyes went blank and his arms went limp,

"... join our army in--"

"- her playing"

"Um, pardon me sir, but what that?" I said almost shaking with fear,

"I just said that the last time I saw her was - when the needle touches."

He went back to his blank eyes and limp arm look,

"EZRALA!!!" I screamed "EZRALA!!!"

My mom hopped up from her seat and ran to follow me, but it was too late, Jake's needle had already appeared in his hand and I watched as it pierced my mom's shoulder.

"NO!!!" I screamed, but as devastated as I was, I had to keep running to get the antidote. I sprinted as fast as I could hoping that my mom would follow me in spite of the fact that the needle took an hour to work. In my despair as I looked back, my mom had already turned into

the Ezrala! They must have improved their formula somehow! And now it worked right away! But I kept running and didn't stop until I made it to the antidote room.

I violently swung open the heavy metal door and rushed inside, but to my horror the room was teeming with the Ezrala, and in the middle of it was Cassie! Blanked faced and zombie-like. She and her dad must have had gotten it from their mother! Despite the horrifying sight I grabbed two of the spray bottles, and rapidly started spraying all over the Ezrala, in hope the needle would disintegrate from their hands. But to my uttermost horror, it seemed that when they improved the ezrala solution the antidote didn't work anymore! I had nothing else to do, tears streamed down my face in my useless attempt of spraying the bottles. The voices of the ezrala echoed in my head as I felt the sharp pain of the needle in my shoulder. It was as if my heart had stopped, everything went quiet and the only thing I could hear was one voice uttering those horrible words that people dread; when the needle touches your skin, you join our army in never-ending sin. That voice was none other than mine.