

End Of Earth: Fire Planet

Chapter One: What to run that by me again?

Seth looked to the imposters who called themselves Eric and Rebecca Tompson. In his mind, he knew the truth, the facts of how they died and didn't want to believe the dead were standing in front of him now like a zombie movie gone bad. Seth had read the official reports and was angry at what he saw.

"You are not their grandparents." Seth exclaimed in his best authoritative tone. His heart began to beat faster. He could feel his veins popping up on the sides of his face and arms. Seth was in the middle of a mental crisis that wouldn't go away until he had the answers he wanted to hear.

Eric nodded. "What you read in your reports was true, Eric and Rebecca are dead. We're duplicates." He looked to John and Julie; they were about to learn the truth of what happened over 60 years ago. Julie was still unconscious and was lying on the ground after having fainted at seeing her grandparents alive on an alien world.

"You want to run that by me again?" Seth asked with his eyebrows raised.

"All in due time." Eric looked to where Julie was laying. "But first, let's find her a more comfortable place to sleep. Follow me please." John picked his sister up in his arms and the group headed down a long narrow hallway into the thick black darkness that constituted their living environment.

The entire complex was underground and was made out of several connecting tunnels leading almost everywhere except up towards the surface. The environment outside the caves was both inhospitable and deadly to those not accustomed to the temperature or climate.

The small group kept walking until they reached a door. Eric pointed to the opening. "She can sleep here until she recovers. I apologize for the accommodations, but it's the best we've got."

John entered carefully inside the room making sure he didn't hit Julie's head on the door frame. As he stepped inside, he took a look around. It wasn't much; a small simple cot was lying against the back wall farthest from the door. John maneuvered the cot with his foot until it was resting flat on the ground; he placed Julie on the cot and quietly exited the room not disturbing her, and closed the door behind him. "She should be awake within an hour or so." John explained "She's done this before, it's nothing to be worried about."

Seth looked to Eric, now that they had gotten the unimportant duties out of the way it was time for answers. As he looked to Eric, Seth could only feel hatred going through his mind. He was determined to find out what was going on and didn't want to take no for an answer.

Eric met Seth's gaze and smiled gently. "Yes Seth, we can talk now." He turned away from the door and headed back the other way down the long dark hallway. Eric shook his head a few times, the government always wanted everything to go their way. They could never slow down or be trusted in any situation. He thought that after 60 some odd years, things would have changed on Earth. But he was wrong. Oh well, he thought, can't win them all.

After passing three doors, they reached another room to the left. Eric stepped inside and flipped on a light switch. The room slowly grew brighter and brighter until it was at a sufficient level of illumination. A long table with a glass top and marble legs was in the middle of the room. Beautiful cherry wood surrounded the glass securing the tabletop to the legs that went down into the floor. Several high back chairs surrounded the table creating a comfortable environment and atmosphere.

John looked around the room for a moment. He didn't exactly enjoy the thought of being so deep underground. He had never been on a planet that had its own stable atmosphere. John had been so use to the moon or a station that used simulated gravity and oxygen devices. This was all a new experience for him. It was something he would have to get use to. Although John hoped that he wouldn't be there too long. Sure it was exciting, but he was feeling uneasiness from it all. That overwhelmed him greatly, and he prayed that no one else could tell.

Eric gestured to the different chairs around the table. "Please have a seat." John and Seth followed the invitation. Eric sat at the head of the table near a large holographic image display of Earth implanted in the wall.

"May I get you anything to drink?" Rebecca asked. It had been a while since they had seen any other humans or had any type of company of any kind.

John and Seth both shook their heads. "No thank you." They were more interested in what was going on and didn't have any desire to drink anything at the present moment.

Rebecca looked at Seth for a bit when it clicked in her head. "Tom had a son named Seth... but you can't be him, can you? You'd be a lot older than..." She paused as it all came together.

"You are Tom's son. Yes I can see the resemblance now. Thought you were his grandson. All that genetic engineering you've gone through. Such a waste." She paused. "Tell me, what have you given up?"

"Speaking of genetic engineering" Seth said, ignoring the question.. "You're clones." His voice was accusatory and his tone was that of disgust.

Eric shook his head and gave a slight laugh. "We're much more sophisticated than the average clone." He replied. "Don't ask me to go into the technical attributes of it, I don't understand it myself sometimes." Eric paused trying to figure out a way to explain their situation. "You see, when the original Eric and Rebecca traveled here they made a few scans of this planet. Unknown to them the Argians, the inhabitants that use to live here, made their own scans of their vessel. They made duplicates of your grandparents and the shuttle they were aboard right down to the last molecule."

"What happened to the... Argians?" Seth asked.

"They died from a severe plague." Rebecca said as she sat down next to her husband. "Years ago, scientists on this world discovered that a terrible disaster would eventually eradicate this planets entire population. A super nova from a neighboring star system."

"Time ran out?" John asked.

Eric nodded. "We were created so someone would remember their society and culture." He added. "They simply did not want to be forgotten." Eric paused for a moment. "We've never actually met a member of their race, we only know about them from records left behind."

Rebecca nodded in agreement. "We've studied the Argians' databases after realizing who we were and that we couldn't leave this place."

"Why can't you leave?" Seth mused.

"It's something in our genetic code sequence. We are dependent on this environment." Rebecca gave a sigh as if it were difficult for her to admit. In the real Rebecca's life, her life span was determined by a damn device in her arm, and now as a clone she was dependent on a planet she was forced to call home. Life wasn't fair... at least that's how the phrase went.

"Why haven't you aged?" John asked.

"When we were cloned... the Argians re-sequenced several DNA strands that control the aging process." Eric replied. "When we awoke from the growth tubes we were this age and have remained this age our entire existence."

"Have you ever tried to leave?" Seth inquired... crossing his arms over his chest he leaned back in his chair.

Rebecca nodded her head. "On one occasion, we almost died from the attempt. That's when we realized we couldn't survive without this planet."

Seth cocked his head back. "Okay, let's say you are these people." He said in a low tone. "Why didn't you just kill yourselves? You had no place to go, you were exiled here from all outside contact."

"Because we're not part of the Tribunal!" Eric replied in a cold tone as he implied the barbaric ways of the government. He didn't have to live on Earth to know that the government was corrupted. He knew it from the beginning when he was only an ensign in the Great War. The government couldn't be trusted, and those sent to represent the government were the enemy. He didn't know why he had even decided to sit down at the same table as Seth, and didn't know why his grandchildren had decided to bring him along. Seth was trouble, in Eric's eyes. He couldn't be trusted for a moment. "Let me ask you something."

Seth nodded his head, he had expected this. "Go right ahead." Seth's voice was calm, years of training had prepared him for interrogation situations. This was no different to him. Seth tried to build his mental stability back to where it had been in the past when he was back with the Tribunal. He didn't want to give away any secrets about the Tribunal, even though he had gone against them, a part was still loyal to the organization, which had been founded over one hundred years ago.

"Why are you here? Why did you come with them?"

Seth tightened his crossed arms. Is that all? He wondered. "I had heard news they were configuring Rebecca's shuttle for some kind of flight and I wanted to see what it was all about. There had been talk of coming back to this place. I wanted to see it for myself."

Eric folded his own arms. "That's not very Tribunal of you. What's the catch?"

"No catch. I was just curious."

John sighed, he was afraid of this confrontation as soon as he saw Eric and Rebecca. Seth had known Eric years ago before the war. They had been in the service together, and just happened to go different ways.

"Just curious... right." Eric said, knowing there had to be something deeper.

Seth nodded. "Well, after you destroyed Earth. I had to see what kind of power this planet held."

Eric's face dropped. "Excuse me, we did what?"

Down the hallway they heard a woman scream.

Chapter Two: You're Safe

The screaming echoed through the halls. It was Julie, she had apparently woken up from her fainting spell.

As John ran down the hallway he could only think one thought. Get there before Seth does.

Eric and Rebecca remained behind in the room. Looking to one another they knew what had to be done.

John and Seth made it to the room, where Julie was, at the same time. She was sitting on the cot. Panic stricken and breathing rapidly. When she saw John, she lept off the cot and ran to him.

"Oh John! Tell me, tell me it was just a dream." She paused trying to catch her breath. "I... I... I... saw grandpa and grandma. They were alive... and... young?"

John held his sister in his arms, trying to comfort her. "Shhh, it's okay. You're Safe." Holding her tight he continued to talk to her. "Julie, it wasn't a dream. We are on the Ice Planet. They are here, we made it..."

Julie took a step back. "Seth." She said.

John shot a look back to Seth. He was holding a gun. "Listen. We're going back down to that room. I'm not finished with my answers yet. This stunt of yours won't keep me from finding out the truth!"

John sighed. "Seth, put the gun down. Whatever answers you want, I'm sure we'll find them."

Seth gestured to the door. "Get moving. We're going back to the room."

"Paranoid much?" John asked.

Seth didn't respond, he only continued to point the gun.

As they started making their way down the hallway, John looked to Seth. "You do realize at some point I am going to take that gun away from your cold dead hands right?"

Seth laughed, "Try it and you'll get a bullet in the forehead. Keep moving." He pushed John forward.

John swung around and kicked the gun out of Seth's hand. It went sliding across the floor to Julie's feet.

Julie looked down at the gun.

"Pick it up!" John screamed.

Julie flashed back to the tunnel on the space station, when she and Seth were in a deadlock. Why was she remembering this, it didn't make sense. She stood there frozen, unable to move.

Seth decked John to the ground and ran over to Julie. Picking up the weapon, he shoved her towards her brother. "I said, keep moving!"

They started walking again.

John looked back to Seth and then to Julie. "Why didn't you pick it up?"

Julie shrugged, "I ... I'm not sure."

Chapter Three: The Truth

As they came back to the room, Seth had put his gun away. Threatening John and Julie of certain death if they said a word about his concealed weapon, they entered the room quietly.

Eric and Rebecca still sat at the table with a concerned look on their faces. They sat and watched as the others rejoined them.

Eric looked to John who had blood trickling down his face. "What happened to you?"

John shrugged it off. "Nothing, your doorways are shorter than I'm used to."

Eric cocked his head to one side... he'd have to find out later it seemed.

"How are you dear?" Rebecca asked Julie.

Julie nodded. "I'm... I'm... how do you think I am? I'm a mess."

Eric smiled as he reached over to her placing her hand in his. "It's alright, we won't hurt you."

They spent the next half hour explaining to Julie all that they had revealed to John and Seth.

All the while, Seth was pacing around the room. Muttering to himself. Truly the work of a madman. After Julie had been caught up he approached the table. "Now that she's caught up with the truth, let's get to the bottom of things."

Eric looked to Seth. His cold stare was still trained on him. "Now, what was this you were saying about how we destroyed Earth?"

Seth nodded, "That's right dead man. You and your girlfriend here destroyed Earth." He said, "The Tribunal doesn't have all of the details about how it happened, but we do know it was you."

John interrupted. "I think it had to do with this planet's atmosphere. When your creators scanned your FTL shuttle, it must have left some kind of radiation. When the shuttle made it back to Earth that radiation caused a massive implosion at Earth's core. It was gone in a matter of seconds."

"I see." Eric said. Looking to Seth he paused. "No wonder you watched me die. Tell me, was it pleasing to you to see a man die?"

Seth laughed, "You deserved it. Sure it was old age, but you deserved dying. Killing billions of your own people." He folded his arms. "If I had it my way, I would have killed you myself. It would have been a pleasure to watch you suffer in a slow agonizing painful death."

"Gee thanks." Eric replied. "So you're here for revenge now, is that it?"

Seth smiled. "I am now. You killed my family. I won't allow you to hurt anyone else."

John sighed. "Seth, that was a mistake. They didn't mean to do it on purpose."

Seth stood, he didn't want to hear anything else. Exiting the room the butt of his gun peaked out his back pocket.

"We should keep an eye on him." Rebecca said noticing the gun.

"He'll be fine." Eric said, "Maybe he'll wander up to the surface."

Rebecca shot Eric a look.

"I'm only kidding. It's late, you should get some sleep. We can continue this discussion in the morning."

They went their separate ways for the night.

Chapter Four: Scheming

Seth was at work inside the shuttle. Looking over the various controls and familiarizing himself with the systems. In the time he had been with John and Julie they had been flying the shuttle, he hadn't much time to look over the modifications.

"What are you doing in here?" A voice asked.

Seth looked around, "Who said that?"

Looking around there was no one to be seen.

"What are you Scheming?" The voice asked again.

Seth reached for his gun. "Who said that?!" He screamed. Walking outside the shuttle he circled it twice. "I demand to know who said that!"

"No one, and everyone."

"Seth" it spoke his name.

"Who are you?" He asked, "I told you to leave me alone!"

"Who are we indeed." The voice whispered. "We are many, too many for you to handle."

Seth bolted out of the bay, leaving the shuttle alone.

Eric and Rebecca stood in an observation room watching him leave. "That should spook him for a little bit."

Rebecca looked to Eric, "Are you sure that was a good idea?"

Eric laughed, "What? You wouldn't believe what he use to do in school. I'm just getting back at him for all those years of torment." Looking down at the shuttle, Eric smiled. "Besides, if that doesn't help prove he's not at all with it, I'm not sure what will."

Rebecca shrugged. "Do you think we're going about this the right way? The Argians wanted them to come back... it took years and Eric and Rebecca didn't even make it. They died."

Eric nodded. "I know." He rested against the ledge. "We have to be doing the right thing. It was our makers wish in the event that something happened to Earth. I'm afraid that we won't be around to see it take place."

"That's what I'm afraid of." Rebecca said. Eric brought her close and held her in his arms. "The war is over, life can only get better from here. We've lived a good long life. They've been able to give us something the real Eric and Rebecca couldn't have. Talk about a unique perspective."

"I hope you're right." Rebecca said. "I hope you're right."

Eric sighed. "Me too."

"We're playing with fire, you do know this."

Eric nodded. "Yes I understand."

They left the bay. Knowing what they had to do wasn't easy, but they had to do it. Who were they to question their makers wishes? Sure the makers weren't around, but their presence lingered. They were made for this purpose. Their true purpose.

Chapter Five: Plains Of Fire

The next morning, John and Julie awoke early to find Eric and Rebecca. They wondered throughout the underground caverns only to find them empty. Even Seth wasn't to be found.

"Eric?!" John yelled down a hallway, no answer. "Rebecca!"

Still no answer.

As they continued down the hall, a bright light shone through an open doorway.

"Did we check down here yet?" John asked his sister.

Julie shook her head. "I don't recall coming down this hallway before. Let's check it out."

As they made their way down the hallway, the heat increased. It had been freezing cold, but now something was putting off a great amount of warmth.

Reaching the end of the hallway, they could see what was the cause of it all. A device had been activated. Stepping inside the great room, Eric and Rebecca were at two control centers. "Morning, you're just in time!"

John looked at Julie who shook her head.

"What's going on?" John asked.

Before Eric could respond, Seth came in the room with his gun drawn. Taking Julie by her neck, he pressed the gun against the side of her head. "Yes, what is going on here?"

Eric and Rebecca looked over. "Seth, put that gun away before you kill us all!"

Seth shook his head. "No, I want answers!"

"What more do you want? We've given you everything we know!"

Seth cocked the gun, "Not good enough! Never good enough!"

John eyed Seth out of the corner of his eye. Waiting to make his move.

Seth's hand were trembling. Julie didn't resist. "You both deserve to die!" He pointed his weapon at Eric then Rebecca.

Eric tried to approach the two. Seth trained his weapon on him. "Don't even try it dead man. Don't try it. I would love to kill you right now. But I want answers." He paused, "I want the power source for this planet, you'll hand it over now."

Eric sighed. "We can't do that. It's impossible."

Seth shook his head. "I don't believe you."

"Seth, the planet is the power source." Eric said.

Seth put the gun back to Julie's head. "You willing to bet your granddaughter's life on that?" Cocking the gun, he felt her trembling in his arms. "Shhh... keep remembering."

John shot Seth a look... remembering? Is that how he's controlling her? "Julie, fight it!"

Julie stood there frozen in a trance.

"You're as stubborn as your father was. Tom. Never could rely on him for anything." Eric said. "He wasn't even that great of an officer, I recall several times Captain Andrews wanted to throw him out an airlock."

Seth took a step back. "He was a great man, don't say that!"

"Do you know what he told me about your dad?" Eric continued "He told me how he had to accept him aboard his ship because all the other qualified tactical officers were taken."

Seth's arm holding the gun dropped a little.

"Look at you. Half a man your father was. Having to rely on genetic re sequencing to manage the years of life." Eric took a step forward "What price did you pay for that? I doubt you were this crazy before they started messing with your innards."

Seth's arm dropped more. "What?"

"Oh you heard me son." He shot a glance to John as if to say get ready.

"I'm not your son!" Seth yelled.

In that time, John made his move. Throwing himself towards Seth's direction he caught Seth off guard. The gun went sliding across the floor towards Rebecca. She picked it up and aimed it at Seth.

With the telepathic link between Seth and Julie broken, Julie ran for cover back out in the hallway.

"You want answers?" John asked, "You can go to hell!" He punched Seth across the face. "You've terrorized us enough."

Seth didn't drop, John's punches didn't faze him.

"That all you got John? Come on, you've got to do better than that."

Two shots rang out. Seth dropped to the ground dead.

Rebecca lowered the gun. "I don't have time for this."

Eric and John exchanged glances. Did that really just happen? Julie peered from the hallway slowly making sure everything was alright.

Dropping the gun to the floor, she focused back to the control console. "We have to complete our final task."

John approached Rebecca "Your what? Your final task?"

Rebecca nodded. "Yes John. The message for you to come back here, it was meant for all the remaining survivors of Earth. Before long, this planet will be habitable for all of your refugees. They'll have a place to call home again."

John shook his head "I don't understand."

Eric walked back over to his console. "We're giving you back what you deserve. A planet full of life. This device, The Plains Of Fire, will reconfigure this planet to be exactly like Earth. You'll be able to live out the rest of your years the way it should be."

John stammered, "But... but why?"

"John, no one deserves to be without a home. From what you've told us, you never knew Earth. Let us make up for the past mistakes of our makers, and the devastation that damn radiation caused. Let us give you a home."

Deeming it was safe, Julie entered the room. Looking down at Seth's lifeless body she moved his hand with her foot. Yep dead.

"Think of it as a gift." Rebecca said. "I'm sure your grandparents would have done the same."

"What about you?" John said. "How will this affect your dependency on this planet?"

"Everything comes with a price." Eric said. "To use an old phrase, nothing in life is free. You have to pay the piper."

"No!" Julie said. "We can learn so much from you! You have our grandparents memories and experiences."

"Sorry dear." Rebecca "It has to be done. Let us do this for you."

Tears streamed down Julie's eyes. She couldn't believe this was happening.

"Tell them of us. Let them know we did it for them. For you." Rebecca said. Picking up a device, she handed it over to John. "Here are documents. All of our research and that of our creators. I'm sure you'll find a suitable place for these in a library or ... something."

John nodded. "I will." Looking to Julie, he smiled then looking back to Rebecca and Eric "I only wish we could have gotten to know you more."

Eric nodded "You'll have to do some reading. I imagine the real Eric left behind something to remember him by.... we only want to do the same."

Stepping over Seth's dead body, John smirked. His smirk disappeared as he realized that Seth didn't really have a chance. Once a slave to the Tribunal, you were theirs forever. Whatever Hell Seth ended up in, John hoped it wouldn't be to rough a ride. "He deserved better."

John and Julie left the room and made their way back to the shuttle.

Chapter 6: Final Goodbyes

As Rebecca's shuttle rose up out of the atmosphere of the ice planet. John and Julie looked down at the world, it had already started to change its appearance into that of Earth. John imagined land masses wouldn't be the same, but there would be oceans, mountains, trees.

Julie hoped to have an island full of penguins, but that would remain to be seen.

Opening one final radio channel, John and Julie said their goodbyes.

Firing up the engines, the shuttle went into FTL travel on its way to their old home, Space Station Beta in old Earth orbit.

Down on the planet, Eric and Rebecca watched as the structure of the planet started to change and take on a new form. The cavern in which they stood began to tremble and quake. Holding each other tightly, Eric and Rebecca enjoyed a final kiss.

At that moment, they fully realized they had done the right thing.

Epilogue

Sixty-three years after Earth was destroyed. Another planet came to life. It became a new Earth ready for population. Once the new Earth was made known, ship after ship came to populate the planet. People came with their children. Grandchildren brought their grandparents. Daughters brought mothers. Sons brought fathers.

It was time to begin again. Time to start anew and realize the potential the human race had. Having been through a great and terrible war, the civilizations of new Earth had found a place to rebuild and begin again. All it would take is time.

John and Julie stood overlooking a hillside where two gravestones stood.

"Eric. Rebecca. I didn't have the chance to know you long. But for what it's worth, thank you." John said. Putting his arm around his sister they made their way back to their new home.

The End