

A Race Before Dark

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英语阅读

逃离贝塔星球

A Race Before Dark

• 迪恩·阿纳斯塔西奥 著

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A Race Before DARK



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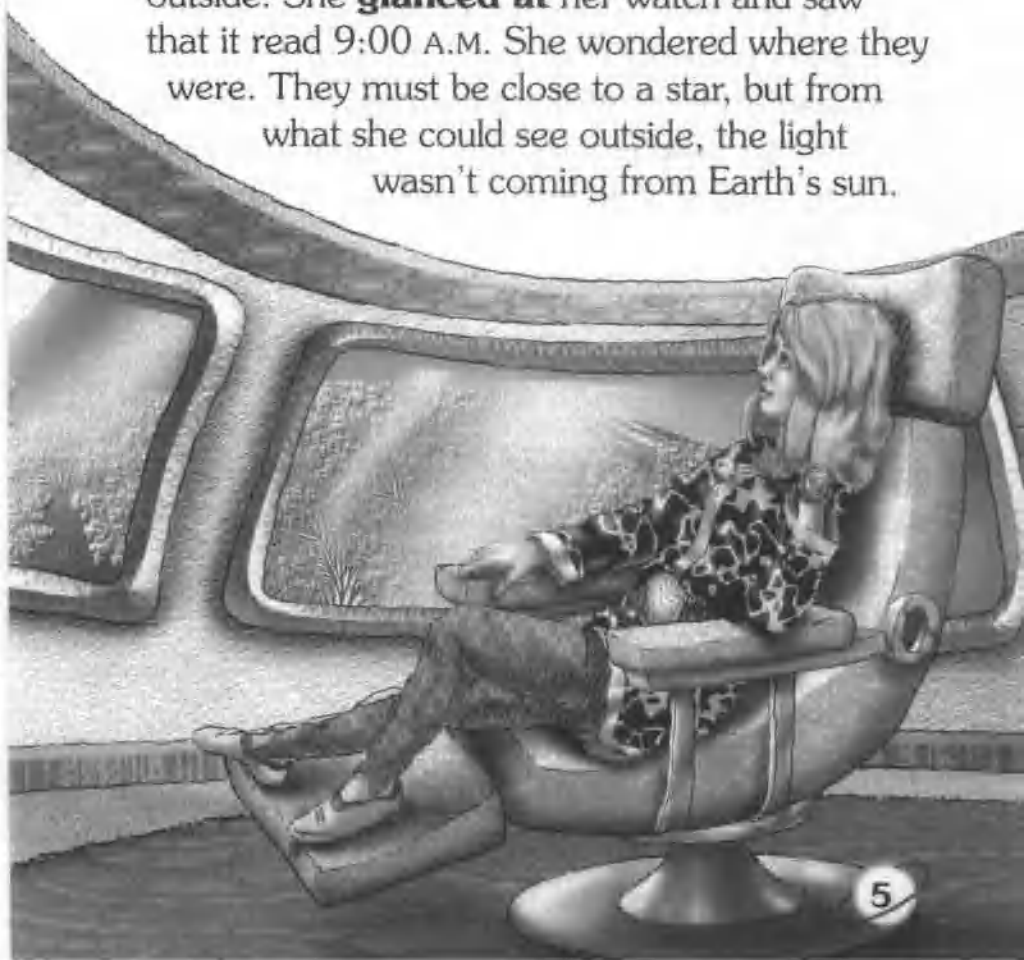
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**For Eliza and Isabella,
with love**

CHAPTER
1

Landing on Beta

Kiki was sleeping when the spaceship lurched and slowed. She opened her eyes and **peered through** the window. It was light outside. She **glanced at** her watch and saw that it read 9:00 A.M. She wondered where they were. They must be close to a star, but from what she could see outside, the light wasn't coming from Earth's sun.



"Are we home yet?" Carlos asked. He was sitting in the seat beside his friend. Carlos had been sleeping, too. "This place doesn't look like our solar system," Carlos said, as he **leaned** closer to the window. "That star is not our sun."

"No, it isn't," Kiki sighed. She was looking forward to getting back to Earth. She had been gone for a long time. Her father sometimes took her with him on business trips during school vacations. This time he had wanted her to see some of the Alpha Galaxy, which was a long way from the Milky Way Galaxy, where the Earth was a **tiny** planet among millions of stars. He had even let Kiki invite her friend Carlos to join them.

Everything they had seen had been fun and interesting.

Now the winter vacation was almost over, and she was ready to go home. She wanted to get home in time to celebrate the new year with the rest of her family and friends.





Kiki glanced at her watch again. "The captain said we wouldn't get home to Earth until tomorrow morning," she said. "Did you feel the ship jerk?"

"I felt it all right," Carlos said. "Do you think something's happened to the ship?"

The spaceship lurched again. Then the captain's voice crackled through the **speaker**.

"This is Captain Brown," he said. "We need a new part for our ship. We'll have to make a stop on the planet Beta."

"Wow! We're going to land," Kiki said.

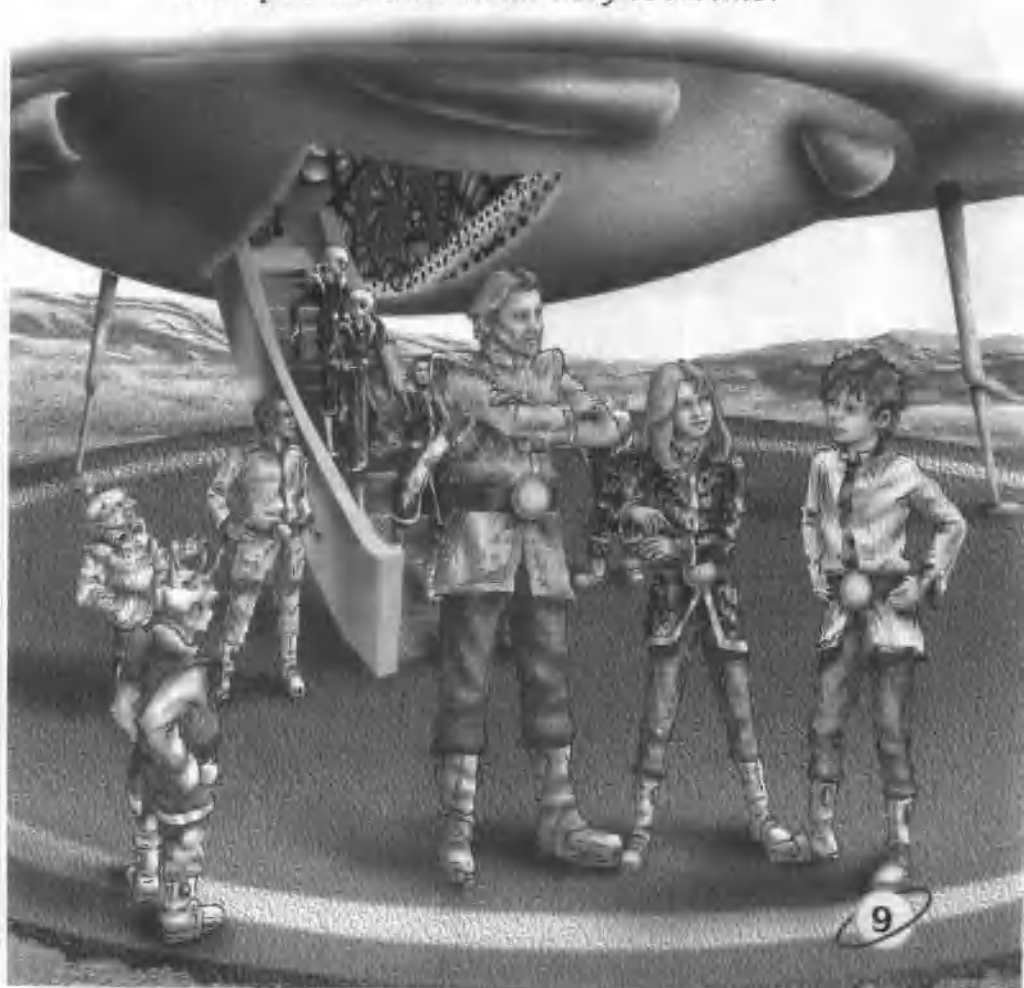
"Beta is a friendly place. It's a well-known stop in the Alpha Galaxy," the captain went on. "We have called ahead and found out that their flight center has the right part for our ship. Don't worry. We'll be back on Earth in plenty of time to ring in the year 2500. Since we'll be on Beta for a few hours, **feel free to** get off the ship for a while. If you haven't been here before and you're from Earth, you will need to wear **gravity** boots. Beta is a much smaller planet than Earth is, so there is less gravity here. The gravity on Beta has about the same pulling force as Earth's moon. The boots will help you keep your feet on the ground."

As Captain Brown prepared to land the spaceship, Kiki's father reminded her and Carlos to put their gravity boots on over their shoes and buckle their seat belts. It wasn't long before they landed. Kiki and Carlos **headed for** the door.

When they got outside, Kiki pointed up to the sky and said, "Look, Carlos, Beta has two suns. We could only see one from inside the spaceship. Two suns is really different from Earth where there's only one. According to my watch it's almost 9:30 A.M."

"Your watch is on ship time," Carlos said. "We don't know what time it is on Beta. We don't even know how long the days are. I wonder what kind of life there is here." He sounded very excited and a little bit nervous.

"We must be able to communicate with the **creatures** who live here," Kiki told him. "Captain Brown said they had the right part for the ship. I wonder what they look like."





Kiki loved to travel to other planets because everyone looked so different. On one planet she had been to, there was so much water that the creatures who lived there had **fins**. No one had feet because there was no place to walk. On another planet, everyone had tiny little eyes. It was too dark to see much, so they didn't need to use their eyes to know where they were going. Instead they used their ears and noses to sense what was around them.

Everyone gathered together on the landing strip. Some people started asking Captain Brown to tell them a little about Beta. Kiki and Carlos walked over to the group to listen.

Before Captain Brown had a chance to talk, a strange little air-powered **vehicle** slid across the landing strip and stopped near him. Something handed a box to the captain. Kiki and Carlos couldn't tell what the pilot looked like. It was dressed in a thick white suit and a helmet and its bottom half was inside the vehicle.

Kiki was trying to see what was inside the vehicle when she heard a sudden, loud, banging noise in the distance. She jumped.

"Did you hear that?" Carlos whispered.

"Yes," Kiki said. "I wonder what's going on."



The noise was getting louder and more rhythmic. It sounded like hundreds of drums were booming. Added to the noise were blasts that sounded like trumpets.

"I think I hear people shouting, too," Kiki said. "It sounds close, maybe just over there." Kiki pointed toward a hill.

Kiki walked over to her father. "Dad, do you know what that noise is?" she asked. "It's coming from the other side of that hill."

"No, I don't," her father said. "Captain Brown said something about this being a big day on Beta, but he didn't get a chance to explain. He had to take the ship part to his crew."

"Can we **climb up** that hill and take a look?" Kiki asked.

"All right," her father said, "but don't stay too long or go too far. Captain Brown said we have to leave by nightfall **at the latest**."

Kiki looked at her watch again. It said 9:35 A.M. She thought they would have plenty of time to find out what the noise was. She had forgotten what Carlos had said about Beta time.

"Dad, could you ask Captain Brown to send some kind of a **signal** before the ship is ready to go?" Kiki asked.

"I'm sure he'll do something to let everyone know they have to get back on the ship," her father said.

"OK. Come on, Carlos," she said. "Let's go look." Carlos and Kiki ran for the hill. It didn't take them long to get to the top.



CHAPTER 2

The Games Begin

At the top of the hill, thick bushes **blocked** their view. Kiki and Carlos couldn't see anything, although the noise was now nearly deafening.

"Those drums are really loud now," Carlos said. "Whoever is making that noise must be on the other side of these bushes. Maybe we should turn back."





"I just have to see what's going on" Kiki said. "Look, there's a little gap in the bushes. Let's go."

Carlos and Kiki began to **squeeze through** the bushes. After a couple of steps, Kiki began to feel a little scared. The leaves seemed to cling to her shirt and hair like sticky tape or little hands. They rattled together and made a terrible clacking sound. These bushes were definitely not like Earth plants.

Finally, Carlos and Kiki pulled themselves out from the bushes on the other side. "I don't think I want to go back that way," said Kiki.

"Yeah," said Carlos, panting. "Those leaves are really strange."

Carlos and Kiki were standing on a hillside looking down at what appeared to be a large **arena**. The drums and trumpets were quiet now. Someone was shouting.

"Listen," Kiki whispered, "can you understand what language that is?" Carlos shook his head no.

Kiki turned a small knob on her watch. Now the voice was speaking English through a small speaker.

"Turn on your translator," she told Carlos. He turned the same knob on his watch.

"It sounds like announcement," Carlos said.

"The announcer is saying something about a schedule of events."

