

Air: Critical

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Written & illustrated by

Ethan Osei

Aged 9

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Thanks to my friend Robert for inspiration for his character, thanks to my cousins Alannah and Jasmine for the ideas for the strong female characters, and finally thanks to my parents Yvette Twumasi-Ankrah and Chistopher Emmanuel Osei.

Chapter 1

EJ was on the underground train when he heard it.

The aggressive chanting seemed to be coming from two carriages away - and he didn't want it to carry on any longer. He walked over to where he'd heard the chanting, and what he saw was awful. A riot had started and people were getting injured. While he watched, trying to avoid the vicious right hooks and elbows being swung at him, he was pushed forwards into the fight.

Then everything went black.

By the time he woke up, the chanting had stopped. He had arrived at his destination. Pulling himself up using the bannister on the train, he cautiously stepped off onto the platform. EJ opened his phone and called his mother.

“It’s happened again, the chanting, it’s getting out of hand now. This time I was knocked out by a protester!” exclaimed EJ.

He walked up the steep concrete stairs on the phone to his mother. She told him to not go on that train line anymore, he said “goodbye” and hung up. As he exited the subway, he saw red smoke fill the sky. He heard a whistle and more red smoke appeared.

“Flares must be being fired,” he muttered to himself. Instead of going to work, he decided to venture towards the source of the flares.

When he arrived there were hundreds of protestors. He understood the chants now.

A few weeks ago the government became corrupt. They started charging people for their oxygen. For several weeks, people had been protesting against them.

Many were jailed for the dangerous climate they created. The flares filled people's lungs with smoke and they struggled to get enough oxygen.

The problem was that the smoke from the flares was blocking off the sky and making a citywide greenhouse.

For the last few days, EJ tried to find ways to stop the protestors because they are killing the homeless and the poor as they cannot afford the air they need to survive.

His friends Alannah and Robert agreed to start a resistance with him. They, as well as him, have the money to afford air as they are roommates and go to the same college.

Chapter 2

Suddenly, booms echoed around the city, protestors shooting flares at the cause of the noise.

Waking up instantly, Alannah's eyes started darting around the room. Her dream was awful. She had seen a war right there in her room. Bombs. Tanks. Soldiers.

She scrambled for her phone and called EJ and Robert.

"Guys, something just happened, I had a dream, I saw war. It was like a vision. Like it was going to happen!" she exclaimed.



“You’re probably hallucinating, you should get a drink of water,” said Robert.

“Robert’s right, you just need to rest,” says EJ.

Alannah hung up because she felt annoyed with them. She knew something was going to happen, but she didn’t quite know what.

She decided to get dressed and drive into the city.

She was always the most stubborn in the group but made sure to take care of herself. Alannah was the one to ensure that there was food in the cupboards and water coming out of the taps.

Without looking back, she picked up her emergency rucksack, her keys and exited.

Chapter 3

After speaking to Alannah, Robert walked to the bakery to get a dozen doughnuts for his brother George’s birthday party.

He muttered to himself.

“Maybe we were too hard on Alannah, maybe she’s right, there might be a war brewing.”

Robert was the brainy one, who knew how to dismantle and rebuild anything. When EJ crashed his BMX when they were 9, Robert built the parts EJ needed to fix it.

“I need to find my way to the city centre, maybe I can find out more about what Alannah thinks is going to happen,” Robert thought.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

“What was that?” Robert exclaimed.

“I need to investigate!”

Robert reached into his back pocket where he kept his phone and called EJ.

“Where are you, bro?” Robert cried.

“City centre, why?” EJ replied.

“I’m over at the bakery and I’m hearing rumbling, do you think it’s a thunderstorm?”

Chapter 4

“No! It’s tanks, the protesters have been shooting flares all over the city. They’re probably planning something... Like attacking the government!” EJ exclaimed.

“Come here now!” he yelled.

“Will do! Heading there anyway!” Robert replied.

“By the way, did Alannah tell you where she’s going?” Robert asked.

“No,” EJ replied.

“Thought so, anyway bye.” Robert said.

He hung up and rushed over to the city centre.

The war had begun.

Alannah, Robert and EJ were all in the city centre, hiding behind an abandoned building. Protesters were everywhere, yelling and shooting flares at the military. The sky was thick and red with the smoke from the flares. The friends were covering their mouths with their hands trying not to breathe in the toxic fumes.

Before Robert left the apartment he had checked the news, it said protests were worldwide telling every government to stop taxing the oxygen.

In some countries such as Australia and New Zealand, civil wars had broken out. It seemed that all the governments were charging people for their oxygen. In Australia, Canberra had been bombed so severely people had to evacuate. Robert was afraid it would happen in America too.

Would his fears become a reality?

Chapter 5

The friends decided to leave the city and journey to the Nevada Desert in Alannah's car. They had to avoid the protestors and the military but they eventually snuck through. They reached the desert and booked into a hotel.

"We need to do something about this, we must form some sort of resistance," said EJ.

Alannah and Robert agreed.

"We need people who don't agree with what the protestors are doing or what the government is doing. They are just making a harsh environment for people to survive," continued EJ.

They had been communicating with others who agreed with creating a resistance. They had agreed to meet at this hotel if

things got bad. The owner and all the guests were part of the resistance too.

They held a meeting to discuss how they were going to storm a nearby military base where members of the government were being hidden in order to stop the rising civil war.

The hotel owner, Janice, was a great engineer, before she retired and opened the hotel. James, Alannah's cousin, used to work at the military base so he was familiar with the layout. Everybody had their own unique skills that would help the resistance.

“So tell me again how we're going to ‘bust down the military's front door’ EJ?” James asked.

“Same way me, Alannah and Robert snuck through the protestors and military - *with stealth!*” EJ answered.

“Guys check the news!” Janice exclaimed.

“Ok,” Robert replied.

“What! We're on the news!?” Alannah exclaimed.



“It says the resistance plans an attack on a military base”, quoted Robert.

EJ remarked, “I see a drone from the news channel flying around our hotel. We need to get out of this hotel otherwise the military will arrest us.”.

Immediately, they left the hotel after the news report. They leaped into Alannah’s car, and headed directly towards the military base, where the leading members of the government were being kept safe from the protestors.

The resistance arrived late at night outside the military compound with its reinforced titanium alloy walls. They made camp until the early hours.

Well-rested and well-prepared, they climbed onto each other's shoulders and managed to breach the walls. They crawled along the battlements and then scaled the sniper towers. EJ, Alannah, Robert and James then gathered to talk about how they would stop the protestors from attacking the government and military.

Robert took control of the airwaves, delivering a powerful message to the nation about peace, teamwork, hope and hard

work. He had hoped it would stop the protesting but it just had no effect. The government in response kept on sending the military to trouble the protestors.

The conflict grew...

Chapter 6

Two years later...

Boom!

“We’ve got to get out of here!” exclaimed Janice as she shouted to the resistance. “It’s not safe to stay in a war zone anymore,” James shouted.

Two years ago the radio broadcast they had sent out made the protestors and government angry and agitated. They created a civil war. The resistance still believed there was hope, they believed they could start a new life on Mars.

Jethro Davidson, the head of the military, didn’t want the resistance any longer so he hired a team of assassins and special agents from the military to hunt them down and kill them.

This made the resistance more aware of the dangers they were still facing..

“I know we’ve got assassins and trained military on our tail, but we can’t just chicken out. We’ve got to stop this war before something even worse happens,” EJ said to motivate the rest of the resistance.

“I know we’ve thought about this for a while but I think we should contact NASA to state our plan,” he continued, “If this civil war continues, America as we know it could be lost forever, so could the rest of the world. We knew that Camberra had been nuked and the citizens had to be evacuated for good. THERE WAS NO GOING BACK!” EJ finished.

“Understood.” the resistance answered.

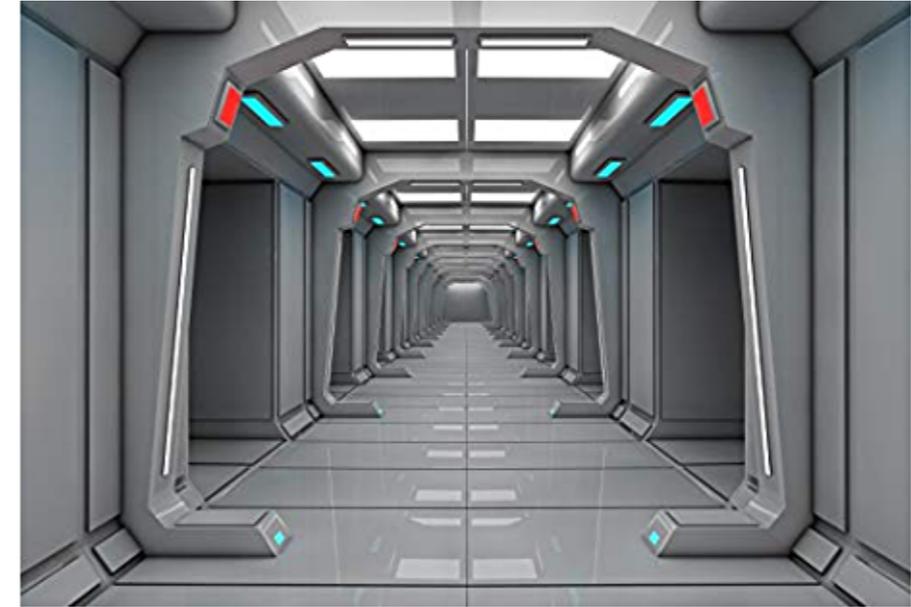
“James, Alannah, EJ.” Robert whispered “I’ve planted a flare outside the compound door. It’s gonna go off in three-two-one!” Robert continued.

A whistle filled the sky as red smoke flew ten feet into the air, then went off with a bang and broke off into a hundred trails of smoke.

Clank!! Clank!! Clank!!

Dozens of guards and members of the military marched out of the compound.

“Go, Go, Go!” EJ ordered as the three rushed into the high tech military base. They trod in silence down the long hallway.



“Don’t make any noise or...” Alannah froze so did EJ and Robert.

“Hands up!” a soldier yelled. “No sudden movements or you’ll all be shot down right where you stand!”

“Errr... NO!” EJ replied as he jumped toward the soldier, grabbed their throat and tackled them to the ground.

“Get off me now!” the soldier ordered.

“Wait... you sound familiar.” EJ said.

“And you have the sass of my cousin!” the soldier replied.

“Are you... Jasmine?” EJ asked.

“EJ? Is that you?” Jasmine replied.

“Yes! It is!” EJ exclaimed.

Chapter 7

“Jasmine, why didn’t you join the resistance?” EJ asked his cousin.

“Well, I was headed to your hideout when Jethro Davidson ordered the 75th Ranger Regiment to head to the city to deal with the protestors.”

Jasmine explained that Jethro was aware that there might be some in the military sympathetic to the resistance so he threatened their families.

“Well, at least you did not threaten to attack Jethro or otherwise you might not have made it here. What will you do now?”

“I’m going to go to Jethro and tell him that I don’t have to be part of this operation if I don’t want to. I’ll tell him that I quit. I won’t be protecting him anymore.” Jasmine decided.

“Be careful. The generals and Jethro won’t like that. They may turn the assassins on you AND the resistance. We have to be super careful, super clever now.”

EJ explained the plan to Jasmine. They agreed to contact NASA but first they decided to check what was frontline because they feared that the war would expand to the rest of the world.

They quickly learned that the same thing was happening in the rest of the world. Governments were aggressively taxing their citizens for oxygen and war was raging out of control.

The fallout was damaging the atmosphere so badly that there was even less oxygen. People were suffering with breathing difficulties and related illnesses.

Back at the hotel. Jasmine and James contact NASA. Over the course of a few days they come to the conclusion that the atmosphere was now too badly damaged and Earth was rapidly becoming uninhabitable.

They hatched a plan to evacuate in shuttles and rockets to bases on Mars. The Red Planet had bases that were set up and protected by the International Space Agency. They needed to start immediately.



NASA provided the resistance with free access to the airways so that they could contact the citizens of Earth to tell them that they needed to evacuate immediately.

Over the course of ten to eighteen months every country was provided with a safe glass dome to house their citizens on Mars. The glass domes had running water and an ecosystem like their country back on Earth.

The evacuation began...

Chapter 8

Jethro Davison did not like this idea at all. He wanted the people to stay. He didn't believe in the scientists' forecasts about the atmosphere. He refused to evacuate and soon the atmosphere worsened to a stage where it no longer holds enough oxygen for human life.

Everyone else evacuated safely except Jethro Davison. EJ, Alannah, Jasmine, Robert, James and the rest of the people of Earth settled on Mars, trying to forget about the war that was once raging on Earth.

Now ten years later, at the age of thirty EJ, Alannah, Robert and Jasmine still wonder if there are any more threats to their new home.

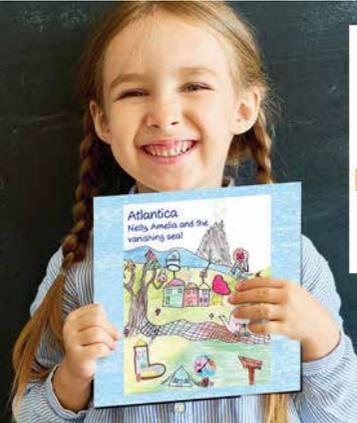
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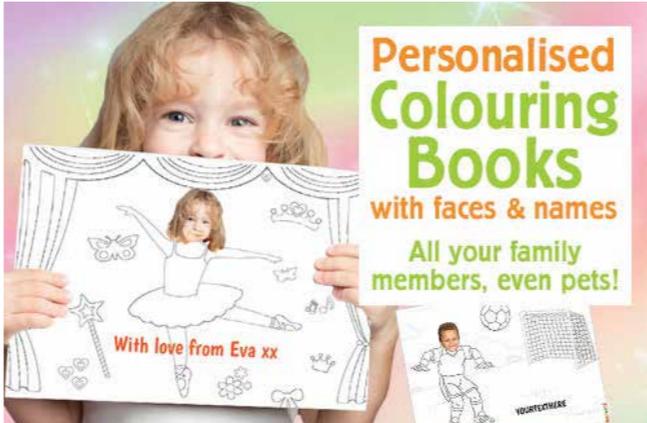
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