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Title: See You in the Next Dimension

Twenty billion years ago, if someone had told young me that I would live until the human race would go extinct, I would have assured them that they were going crazy. Now, however, as I watched the abandoned Earth, I assured myself that *I* was going crazy. First, though, let's rewind a few millenniums.

The year was 3047, and life was marvelous back then, hanging out with my absolute closest friend, Sarah. I knew our time was scarce before she packed up and moved to her college in Ohio. I was a freshly-congratulated valedictorian of Eastview High School. When someone earns such a colossal achievement like that, their life changes from plain nerd to 'Your Future Boss', not to mention the fact that Ivy-league colleges start begging them to join their college. Oddly, I gave up all of this to go Grimsel College of Astronomical Research, which was close to my city and lowly respected. Space was my burning passion, and I had to pursue it, even if it meant giving up my prized scholarship to Harvard.

Anyway, the day came: my first day of college. The building was cramped, but buzzing, with both technology and experimentation. That day, we were taught about the fifth dimension, how time and space were meaningless in 5D.

"Mr. Landry?" I asked after class that day. He was a towering, thin man, with a faint mustache, and bruise-colored circles under his eyes.

"W-when will my first m-mission be?" I stammered.

He stopped cleaning the board and stared at me. "*Missions*, Astra? It's only been your first day!" Mr. Landry puzzledly stared at me.

"But I'm the best student here!"

"*But*," he reminded me, "you could die on a mission!"

I harrumphed, defeated, before my stubbornness spoke. "I'm leaving anyway."

He sighed. "Fine, you'll go on the easiest mission."

"Which is...?" I pressed.

"You're going to another dimension."

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Teleporting between dimensions isn't hard, since it was mastered many years ago. Soon, I ended up in the fifth dimension. I spent about a year there, until I decided to visit my parents back home.

My smile consumed my face with the excitement that I would be near my family in seconds. When I saw what awaited me in the Third Dimension, however, my face collapsed. A barren landscape surrounded me, laughing at my panicked expression. I realized that time had gone slower in the fifth dimension. At least twenty *billion* years had passed. Panicked, I wanted to believe that it was all just a nightmare, a bad dream that my subconscious had conjured up, but I knew that this was not a bad dream—it was Earth.

Worse, it was what was left of it.

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*"Our valedictorian this year is..." Principal Sanders paused, for suspense or excitement, I couldn't tell. "...Astra Spinetti!" Cheers erupted like fireworks as I proceeded to the podium, accepting my certificate and millions of others. I shook hands with so many people that I could barely clutch my awards, and tears were streaming down my face, obscuring my vision. After the tears subsided, my speech was just a jumble of words and fluctuating emotions. Later, Sarah smothered me in a hug, only to have her ripped away from me. Cheerful clouds turned gray, stabbing lightning into the ground, hitting Sarah just above her foot before she disintegrated into nothing.*

*Sirens were blaring; the clouds were slowly consuming everything. I stood, dazed, waiting for the tears to sting my eyes. I realized that I was the clouds, destroying everything. A voice flooded my head then: You are the monster. Then prisoners walked across the courtyard, and I could hear a television anchor covering a story from years ago. "... these prisoners were banished to the fourth dimension in a correctional facility..."*

Then, I woke up. Cold sweat beaded my face until I realized it had been a nightmare. Silently, I cursed my subconscious and glanced around me as I figured out that I had fallen asleep for more than I should have. Strangely, I knew that parts of my dream had been real, including the fact that a handful of prisoners really *had* been banished to the fourth dimension before I had left. If I was still alive, then they had to be living as well. Instantly, I knew that I needed to find them.

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Teleportation was not a problem; I had done it a few times to get to the fifth-dimension. Next thing I knew, I was tumbling into the grass of another world, and I knew it was the correct destination. After I shook the impact, I took a look around, and my eyes were greeted by the prison that I was looking for: *Advanced Prisoner Correctional Facility*. Relieved, I lit up with delight, and I never thought I would be so happy to see a jail building.

Sprinting, I burst into the facility, wondering why there was no security. The building was cramped and dingy—with a pungent smell. Gathered inside was a crowd, all wearing orange prison jumpsuits. “Excuse me?” I asked, and the prisoners looked up. “Do you know who the leader is?” The crowd parted, and a burly man with huge muscles stalked towards me. He held out his watermelon-sized hand. “I’m Blark,” he said in a gruff voice.

“Astra.” We shook hands, and he asked me what I was “visiting” for. “Let’s cut to the chase. It’s been twenty billion years since you’ve been sent here. Earth is... well, dead.”

They chortled. “Did you figure that out all by yourself? We know that. We knew ever since that prisoner went missing a while ago.” My face flustered with embarrassment.

“But please, you have to come with me!” They must have seen my desperation, because the next thing I knew, we all were back in 3-D.

Blark breathed, “Miss, we found that missing prisoner.” I looked over, and thought I was hallucinating.

“Sarah?”