



EXPLORER X – Alpha

Copyright © 2009 Lanita Preston *all rights reserved*

Published by: Phenomenal One Press

P.O. Box 8231, Elkridge MD 21075

*www.phenomenalonepress.com*

*phenomenalonepress@yahoo.com*

First Edition: Feb 2010

Cover Artist: Stephen McDowell

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief embodied in critical articles or reviews.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

**ISBN-10: 0-9841989-0-3**

**ISBN-13: 978-0-9841989-0-0**

**LCCN: 2009907784**

# E X P L O R E R X

## A L P H A

### Prologue

He ran his tongue against his teeth as the inside of his lip burned and tingled with the sensation of pain. Sweat dripped onto his nose, and his eyes squinted while the metallic taste of blood lingered on his tongue. He spit. *This is not over*, he thought. He squatted down to prepare to attack.

“Aadi! Give it up. You will lose on this day!” Damien said as his tall, muscular form heaved from the exertion of the battle. Then he charged, punched Aadi in the gut, and followed through with a kick to the head. As Aadi fell, his anger built. *The time for compassion has ended*, he thought. *Let’s finish this now!* He would fight and kill until it was done.

He stood up at his full height and smiled through the pain. The power of the adrenaline rush from a good fight ran through his huge frame.

“No, *you* have already lost,” he declared. He charged toward Damien and punched him with a power that Damien never anticipated - a blow so mighty that it caused the ground to shiver around them upon the impact. Damien returned the attack with a

## Explorer X - Alpha

strike to Aadi's face. However, Aadi felt no more pain. He only felt powerful, pure, and invincible. He lifted Damien by the neck high into the air. With a tightened fist, he slammed Damien into the ground. With his hand held high, he roared, "It is over!"

Aadi awoke with a rush, still feeling the power, anger, and frustration of his dream. He knew it was time to get up, but he just wasn't ready to give in to his fate and pack. Getting down, he turned and kicked his bed with a fury still fueled by his dream. He glanced at the snowboarder on his wall, surrounded by snow and mountains, and whispered, "That's where I want to be..." Aadi did not want to go to space. Why his parents wanted him to go to this camp sponsored by the company they work for, he didn't know.

He told them that he wanted to go to a sports camp. *Hey, I'd even take a technology camp where I could build robots or videogame programs over this*, he thought. Space was his parent's first love, not his. His dad even set up a replica space cruiser in his workshop and made Aadi help him put it together. Being able to spend time with his father was the only reason he helped out, because his dad was always working - always.

His parents were both astronauts and scientists and desperately wanted their only son to experience what they loved about work. He couldn't figure out why this was so important to them. Aadi scratched his chin while he read the brochure again and then looked at Coach, his brown German Sheppard. Coach

wagged his tail so Aadi patted him and said, “I don’t want to go to space camp, boy. I mean, why can’t I go to football camp or lacrosse camp like my friends? This camp is for geeks, but I guess now it’s no turning back. They have made up their minds.” Coach barked in agreement and then wagged his tail harder while Aadi vigorously scratched his ear.

“Well, I’d better start packing,” he said in frustration. He grabbed his duffle bag and quickly stuffed in the items that were thrown around the floor.

He thought about his desire to go to sports camp and pondered how his mom seemed to put him in every sport she could think of, as if she was trying to find something that he would fail at. They all came so easy to him, and he loved them all, which made him what his mother had called “an all-around jock.” If she felt that way, why wouldn’t she let him go to where he wanted to for camp?

He turned to say goodbye to his room, and his eyes fell on Ebu. Coach started to growl at his latest invention - a miniature robot that had an intelligence chip that made it act and talk like it was an intelligent friend. As far as Aadi knew, there was no other robot like Ebu that allowed it to evolve as a human would, so he was proud of his unique creation. Ebu stood about one and a half feet tall, six inches wide, and was collapsible, just the perfect size for sneaking in and out of school in Aadi’s backpack.

Aadi had experimented with all types of devices on Ebu to

## Explorer X - Alpha

make him undetectable whenever he took him to school. His mom would often help him with his ideas for Ebu since she worked mostly on experimental devices used for the security department of her company. As Aadi's eyes fell on Ebu, he lifted a dark eyebrow in thought, "Hmm, Ebu, today is your lucky day! You are coming with me to camp!"

Ebu replied in his musical voice, "Why, Aadi, I thought I would have to sneak into your bags on my own."

"Aadi, hurry up, it's almost time to leave, and you have just enough time for breakfast!" his mom yelled from the kitchen. Aadi ran to the bathroom, brushed his teeth quickly, and returned to his room to grab his bag.

Aadi stuffed Ebu into his duffle bag, ran down the winding stairs to the garage, and put his duffle bag into the trunk of his dad's black and gold Hover Mobile, one of the first of its kind. His dad helped invent it, as well as other flying vehicles marketed and sold by his company. It looked like a regular SUV, but it had the ability to fly about nine feet off the ground. His dad rarely put it in flying mode because in the year 2080, it freaked some of the other drivers out. It was starting to catch on, though, and Aadi decided he would ask him to put it in hover mode before he left for his eight weeks of space camp.

He ran into the kitchen with Coach in tow. "Mom! What's for breakfast?" Then, he sat at the kitchen island. He watched his mom as she smiled at him with her dimpled and light brown sun

kissed face. She winked at him after she selected their meal on the modern-style MegaKitchenator.

“Hey, you!” his mom said as she came over and gave him a huge hug along with a wet kiss on the cheek. “Sit down, and I will get breakfast on the table for you and your dad,” she said and walked back over to the MegaKitchinator.

“Where is Dad?” he asked, as he dimpled up with a smile and leaned on the kitchen island.

“Where do you think?” his mom said with a wink. Aadi knew the answer. He smiled when he pictured his dad, because his dad was the biggest geek he knew. It was obvious to Aadi that his dad was in his workshop, a great lab that reminded Aadi of Batman’s lair. His father would always get animated and loud when talking about a new idea, scientific fact, or some “monumental discovery,” but for all his ideas, his first love was always outer space. Therefore, most of the days his dad spent in his lab were to perfect space travel in some way or another.

He figured that he needed to come up with a plan and absently petted Coach on the head while he bit his lip in thought. The smooth counter surface was cool as he tapped his fingers on it in thought. He tried to think of the best way to convince his parents to change their minds. *Working on Mom will be the best approach*, he thought. *She always has a soft spot for me.*

“Hey, Mom, um... why do you guys want me to go to space camp? You know I really like sports more than space stuff,” Aadi

## Explorer X - Alpha

said with a bit of a whine to his voice. He pressed his lips together to hold his anger in check while he took his yo-yo gasid out of his pocket. He sat and watched it wiggle, spin, and dance up the line, controlled by a computer chip inside the yoyo. The yo-yo moved in perfect motion as it lit up with blue, green, and purple lights, and Aadi watched it intently, not wanting to give away his mood by looking at his mom.

“Well, Aadi, you won’t be alone there. You’ll be with most of your friends from your school and the neighborhood. You ought to feel lucky since only children of employees that work at TEGRC are allowed to go on this maiden voyage.”

*TEGRC... Technical Exploration and Genome Research Corporation*, Aadi thought to himself, wanting to roll his eyes. *Even the name sounds geeky.*

His mother continued trying to sell him on the idea. “You all are the first group around to test the camp and critique it to make it more fun for other kids who want to learn about space travel in the years to come. It’s about a hundred or so kids in total, and the company is so excited for you all. We are excited for you, too” his mom said with a salesman-like smile.

While she spoke, Aadi thought that he should have tried to fail the stupid test, though if he had, he knew without a doubt that his mom would have figured out what he had done and made him retake the darn test again.

“Mom, most of my friends are not going. They are going to

sports camps. Only the stupid geeky kids in this neighborhood are going to that space camp, and they are the only ones so happy about it. Besides, I don't even like Dakota or Damien, and I barely even know the other few kids you told me about," Aadi grumbled with a frown.

"Hey, the car is packed, and I am ready for my big breakfast from my hot babe of a wife!" his dad said, just before he bear hugged Aadi's mom.

"Man, that is getting old," Aadi mumbled under his breath with a smile in his voice.

"Hey, Aadi, I heard that!" his dad said in his booming, laughing voice while he rubbed Aadi's black wavy hair.

"Well, your dear look-alike son is trying to plead his case to me so he can ditch Space Camp and go to sports camp," explained his mom. She placed the plates in front of Aadi and his dad.

His dad grabbed his fork, said a brief and hurried prayer over his food, and shoved the first bite of the omelet in his mouth with a frown on his dark eyebrows. Aadi followed suit and quickly murmured his blessing over his food and stuffed it down in a huff.

"Son, you going to this camp really means a lot to me and your mom. We just knew you are smart enough, strong enough, and big enough to be selected. I know outer space is not your thing right now, but I just want you to give it the same chance

## Explorer X - Alpha

you give your sports and your gadget making. Is that so hard to do?” said his dad with that authoritative voice he always used to convince Aadi he was wrong about something. *Why does my father always do this to me?* he asked himself. His dad had him, because he knew how much he wanted to please them, so Aadi figured he would just suck it up for now and go, but not without a fight.

“Dad, I don’t like the kids I am going with. So that means I have nothing in common with them, and I am going to be with these kids for eight weeks! Eight weeks! That is freaking forever! I read the dumb brochure. All they are going to have us doing is simulation crap to prepare us for any hostile situations. Oh, don’t let me forget the greatest part... visiting a couple of boring planets with no life on them. Then, we get to come home and say, ‘Hurray! We did it!’ We have to wait a full three and a half weeks before they even let us go into the space cruisers for a run to Mars and Jupiter. Whoopee...” Aadi said sarcastically while he raised his voice.

“First of all, watch your language and your tone, son. Secondly, give it a chance. I shouldn’t have let you play with the space cruisers before I released them to the company, and then maybe then you wouldn’t find it so boring. The other kids need ample amount of time to learn how to use the equipment and to do it safely. That’s why a team of scientists, Counselors, doctors, and engineers are all going on this maiden voyage with you. Now,

this discussion over. Stuff that food down, and let's go!" his dad said in same deep no-nonsense voice he used at work. His dad got up, grabbed his jacket, and headed to the garage.

Aadi figured he'd pushed his father too far and had better follow quickly. He took two bites of his omelet and then rushed down his chocolate milk and ran over to his mom for his goodbye kiss.

His mother grabbed him and held him tight to her chest in a big hug and said, "No matter what, I love you. If anything - and I mean ANYTHING - happens that you don't like, call me on the telenex, and don't let anyone know you have it."

Aadi pulled back from her. He saw a tear in her eye, and he lifted his eyebrows in confusion and said, "Sure, Mom, I will."

Aadi grabbed his backpack, went to his dad's workshop, grabbed the telenex out of the safe, and swallowed it. His mom created the tiny round telekinetic device that processed thoughts as a project for them to do together. This was his mom's only prototype, and she hadn't made anymore. He wondered why she would have him take the only one.

The pill burst in his stomach, and little computerized cells expanded throughout his blood system and into his brain, which caused him to wiggle from the sensation. The problem was, his mom hadn't figured out a way to extract it and never released the idea to TEGRC. Again, he wondered why she was so insistent that he use it on this trip and remembered how she had told him

**Explorer X - Alpha**

to put it in the safe about a year ago and hadn't talked about it since.

## Chapter 1

“Aadi, come on!” his dad yelled from the truck.

Aadi closed his backpack, and it stuck to him with clear synthetic skin. He ran to the car and got in.

“Hey, Dad, can we hover on the way?” Aadi asked with a wide, pleading grin.

“Sure you can. I just got it upgraded so we can go into full fly mode through the clouds. I was saving it for when you got back, but we may as well try it out now,” his dad said.

The car welcomed them and said, “Hello, David. How’s the wife Shannon today?”

“She is fine, Gary. Can you put us in fly mode to the TEGRC space pad?” his dad ordered.

For a brief moment, Aadi felt a sensation of pride for his parents’ work. *Right next door to NASA, and TEGRC is beating their butts*, he thought. *Their “space camps” are just Earth simulations. This has to be better than that*, he reassured himself.

His dad glanced at him and said, “You know, son, this will

## Explorer X - Alpha

be a great experience for you. TEGRC is the leading force in space travel and have been doing the civilian space travel program for ten years. That program is only for military and government personnel. But later this year, TEGRC will release their space transit system to any rider that is willing to pay the high price to go to the Space Centrex 1 station that was built by the military fifteen years ago. It's on a hovering space pad between Earth and the moon. As far as travel to the moon, TEGRC gets the best ratings. There are only three companies that sponsor those pleasure tours to the moon, and TEGRC is one of them."

"Great, Pops, really great," Aadi, replied with boredom.

"Well, what do you think?" his dad asked as they reached a height of twenty feet above ground. Aadi looked down and laughed. It was hard to keep a solemn attitude when he saw the small houses of his neighborhood pass below. "I think every kid wishes their dad had one of these babies!" Aadi said as he knocked on the window.

"Well, most of the filthy rich people that can afford to splurge already have a Hover Mobile. The skies down there will be getting pretty crowded soon," his dad said while patting on the ceiling of the vehicle.

"Dad, can I drive it?" Aadi asked excitedly, and rubbed his hands together. Driving these vehicles and all the other sample test vehicles was Aadi's and his dad's secret game. They never

told anyone that Aadi was an even better driver of most of these vehicles than his dad.

His father reached over and pressed the communications button. “Well, since I am not going to see you for eight weeks, sure you can. Remember, though, this is our little secret. Your mother will have a fit with both of us if she even knew about you driving.”

“Gary, put the alternate controls in place so that Aadi can drive,” his father instructed.

“Gary, I want the hand extended controls,” Aadi added. He preferred the hand extended controls because he liked to keep his hands and feet in constant movement. Gary obeyed, and Aadi put his foot on the accelerator and drove toward the space pad with his dad laid back in his seat chatting about work.

Seeing the space pad in the distance, his father told Aadi to put away the controls.

“Gary, resume to previous driver and lock Code 2341 for Aadi’s driving session,” his dad said after he took over the controls. The vehicle lowered directly over the parking space in front of the building. “Well, Aadi, here we are at camp. I am going to get you registered.”

Aadi hopped out of the truck and adjusted his flattened backpack as he closed the door. Watching his dad leave, Aadi went to the back of the vehicle and opened the trunk. He peeked into his duffle bag to look for Ebu.

## Explorer X - Alpha

“Hey, Ebu, you okay?” he whispered into the bag.

“Ebu is here and doing great.”

“Ebu, I want you to go into secret mode, just in case they scan my bags.”

“Ebu will do.”

“Hey... now that I think about it, Ebu, hop into my backpack,” Aadi said as he turned and sat down in the trunk with his backpack at the opening of his duffle bag. Ebu collapsed and climbed into Aadi’s backpack. Aadi turned around and looked side to side to make sure no one saw him before he grabbed his duffle bag to go meet his dad.

He ran through the huge arched glass doors to the Processing Center and looked around.

“Wow,” he said when he walked through the doorway of the building. He looked up at the arched doorway encased in glass and stood dazed while watching a ceiling of flashing stars and planets zoom by.

“Welcome to TEGRC’s space pad,” said the android greeter at the door. Aadi jumped. Androids were still pretty scarce because they were costly to develop, and most companies used them only in work settings that required mundane manual labor. As far as Aadi knew, Ebu was the only android that had been created as a playmate. He built Ebu as the little brother he would never have when his parents confirmed they couldn’t have any more children.

“Uh, hello,” he said to the android. “Where’s Mr. Lear, my father?” Aadi asked it. It looked like an old model, very rudimentary and more like a robot than a person, but with a sleek shape and silver tinge of a sophisticated android that would work in a lab instead of a warehouse.

It was hard for Aadi to pay attention to the android, as rare as it was, because he was simply amazed at the space pad. It looked like an asteroid from the inside out. It had rounded stonewalls and silver metal beams sticking through the ceilings that had black glass doorways labeled, “Transit To Space Centrex 1,” “Space Camp Processing,” and “Labs.” There were many androids greeting incoming people and groups, and the workers had on bright gold and black form-fitting suits with ear tenas connected to their ears that projected 3-D computer keyboards and screens for customers. There were greeting counters on each side that had black tops with shooting stars. Aadi thought it was a little overboard, but still very impressive.

“Wow,” he said again as he looked around for his dad. A lot of the technology here was only seen in very few instances, usually in the homes of what his dad called “the filthy rich” or in large companies and government agencies. He had never seen quite so much cool stuff in one place.

“If you will follow me, I will take you to your father. You may give me your duffle bag, which will be waiting for you in your room when you board the ship,” the android said. Aadi used

## Explorer X - Alpha

his telenex to call his mom. Blinking his eyes and focusing on her face, he said, “Mom, this place is GREEEAAAT!” He pictured his mom in his mind while she drove, and then she smiled at him.

“I knew you would love it,” she said. He made his mind go blank, and her image disappeared.

Aadi followed the android through the door that said “Space Camp Registration”.

“Aadi! Over here, son,” his dad said while he waved over the kids that stood around. Aadi ran past the crowds to get to his dad.

“Hello, Aadi. We need to take a retina scan of your eyes to start your registration. Please look through the opening on the box to my right,” the lady behind the desk said as she pointed.

Aadi placed his eyes in the openings and heard the computer say, “Confirmed... Aadi Lear checked in.”

“Please follow the signs down the hall to the boarding pad. Have a fun time at camp,” the lady said as she touched the button on her ear and a 3-D keyboard appeared.

“Come on, son. It’s already four in the morning, and you need to get settled before blast off, so let’s get you onboard,” his dad added then pushed lightly on his backpack. His dad turned him around, bent down, and gave him a big hug, “I love you, son. Have a good time.”

“Uh, Father, you are embarrassing me. You act like you

are never going to see me again,” Aadi said with a smirk and then turned around to walk through the passageway to the ship.

Aadi glanced at the many other kids that rode on the elevated treadmill. It moved suspended in the air about twenty feet and continued to get higher as it approached a huge silver and gray ship that was shaped like an oval. He was impressed with the ship and noticed it had a level of clear windows on the top and a bright silver outer rim around the middle. The ships wings and propellers weren't outside the ship as in older models. Aadi supposed that they extended only when needed in order to protect them from deterioration and unintended breakage from space debris. The ship looked as though it was a sleek, fancy model of all of the older space shuttles Aadi had seen his parents on before they went into flight twice a year. He wondered to himself, *Why is TEGRC going into the space camp business?*

Aadi felt a punch on his arm. He turned his head to the left to see who hit him.

“Hey, stank breath,” Damien screamed in Aadi's ear while pulling on Aadi's shoulder to get closer. Then he shoved Aadi and rushed pass him to the ship. Damien had dark auburn hair and deep, pale blue eyes. He was shorter than Aadi, but muscular and thick, so he packed a punch whenever he confronted Aadi.

“Ebu, I really don't like that butt hole. Man, his breath stinks. Why did he have to breathe in my face?” Aadi said to his backpack.

Just as Aadi started to walk faster, his right arm was brushed by someone's backpack.

"Oh, sorry... I am in a hurry to get onboard. Excuse me," the girl that tried to pass him said.

"Hey, wait! You go to Buckingham Middle School, don't you?" Aadi said, trying to catch up to her. He had seen her at school, and although she had a bit of a gap in her teeth at the top, she was still kind of pretty. She also loved to play all of his favorite sports. He knew this because she was always playing some sport with the boys. She kept to herself other than that, though, so he had never talked to her before.

"Yeah, what's it to you?" she said as she eyed him while turning slightly during her walk-run to the ship entrance. Aadi looked around to see most of the kids behind him hurrying past to get to the entrance also, so he sped up to walk fast with her.

"Well, I go there, and I've seen you around. You know... playing tag football with the Collington twins?"

"You mean you saw me playing with my brothers, bright boy," she said as she started a small jog. Aadi walked faster to catch up to her.

"You are Paul's and Casey's triplet sister?" Aadi asked with wide eyes. Slowing her down with a tug on her shoulder, he thought, *She doesn't look anything like the twins.* They were both blond haired, blue eyed scrawny kids compared to her slightly muscled form, and she stood taller and wider than both

of them. He noticed her coffee brown hair and deep olive complexion with bright green eyes. While looking her over, he figured she looked mostly like her dad, since Mr. Collington was a dark brown tall man.

“Everyone says that. Try to ask me something new, bright boy.” She laughed, and he noticed a dimple on her right cheek. “So, what’s your name?” she asked.

“Aadi. What is yours?” Aadi said and easily laughed with her.

“My name is Eirena. Don’t try to say it like your-an-us. My name is e-rain-a, bud. Well, got to go, bright boy,” she said. Then she turned around and took off running. Aadi stood there a moment and watched her run off, then shook his head and considered that camp might be a fun place after all.

“Hey, speed up, dweeb!” Dakota said in his squeaky, scratchy, deep put-on voice. *Oh, great, Aadi thought, the class chump and Damien’s flunky is coming to camp with me too.*

“Hey, dude, what are you doing here? I thought you were going to soccer camp?” Aadi asked.

“What do you think, fart face? My parents made me come here instead, but that’s cool, ‘cause now I have you to pick on,” Dakota said as he shoved past Aadi with his shoulder.

Aadi laughed when he recalled beating Dakota in every game they played, but Dakota loved to talk trash and was malicious with it. Aadi watched Dakota’s honey-blond spiky hair

### **Explorer X - Alpha**

move through the maze of kids as he ran toward the ship.

Aadi scratched his head and adjusted his backpack. Then, he realized that he was the last kid to go on the ship, so he picked up his speed to a run and ran pass Dakota to stand in line for room assignments.

