

Astrid's Intergalactic Travels: Mission Disco Planet



CHAPTER 1

Astrid was well aware that landing this space shuttle would be the hardest thing she will ever do as an astronaut. With sirens blaring and scarlet lights flashing, a deep computerised voice booms throughout the compartment.

LANDING!! LANDING!!

“Landing, landing,” it repeats as Astrid clutches the control sticks, her knuckles going white as she pulls them towards her. Her chocolate brown hair, drenched in sweat, hang loosely all around her round face. The shuttle rocks backwards and forwards like a ship in heavy seas, throwing her roughly about in her chair. All Astrid can see through the glass panel in front of her is darkness. Just as the warning signals had informed her, Astrid knows she is about to come to a landing.

Suddenly a large shape looms in front of her, dark maroon in colour and made of a rough substance. It took Astrid a moment to realise that the flat, desolate shape was actually the ground. “Here we go,” Astrid mutters to herself, slamming her hand against the large button in front of her. Instantly the entire ship lurches forward and the bottom of the shuttle slams against the ground, dragging across the planets floor for a few metres before coming to a screeching halt. She falls against the window, gasping from the shock of the impact. Struggling to get her footing again, Astrid stands. Behind her, supply boxes come crashing onto the floor and, to Astrid’s surprise, there was a loud groan. Astrid moves away from the window and frowns as she spins around, facing the source of the noise. Astrid had thought that she was alone.

She was wrong.



Lying on top of the boxes with limbs sprawled out like a turtle that couldn't get back onto its feet, is a boy. Perhaps it was his large shoulder-pads that made it difficult to move off of the supply boxes, or the awkward position he had landed. His bright red footballers uniform a

great contrast to the dark floor of her shuttle – he manages to look entirely out of place, just like he should. What was a footballer doing in outer-space? Annoyance hits Astrid like a brick wall – this was *her* quest, the one that she had been working towards all of her life. She was supposed to find the astronauts that had landed here many years ago and learn their ways so she could become the best astronaut on the planet – or, in her case, on every planet. Astrid didn't need a dumb footballer with golden-blond hair and a bright smile keeping her from her destiny.

“Can you, like, give me hand?” the footballer asks from the floor, staring up at her with round eyes. His voice deep and slurred, keeping his demeanour quite casual – too casual for having just landed on a planet in outer-space.

Astrid frowns at him and decides to let him lie there for a while longer. “What are you doing on my ship?” she demands, her voice sharp and witty. “You aren't meant to be here.”

“What do you think I'm doing, baking a cake?” he throws back at her, his voice oozing sarcasm. When Astrid narrows her eyes, he quickly adds, “Fine, okay, I snuck onto the ship. I saw it leaving and I just, I don't know, climbed on?”

Frustration washes over Astrid, fuelling the ever growing anger that now resides somewhere in the pit of her stomach. Navigating a strange and new planet was difficult enough without having to take care of an immature boy with stupid shoulder-pads. “But why would you do that?” she demands, taking a step towards him.

He let out a deep breath of air. “Every night I look up at the night sky and I think, ‘What is up there?’ And I like, *really* want to know, you know? I saw a chance to achieve something great and so I took it.”

Astrid stares at him, suddenly feeling a sense of understanding; she too looked up at the night sky sometimes, all the time actually, and wonders what it would be like to discover something new and strange. “Fine,” she sighs, offering him her hand. Surprise flashes on the footballer's face; he was taken aback by her sudden act of kindness. He takes her hand and clasps it tightly, using her strength to pull himself up off of the floor. Astrid quite likes the fact that she seemed just as strong as him.

“My name is Derek,” he offers, flicking his blonde hair away from his face.

“Astrid,” she answers distractedly as her eyes scan the room for her backpack. Inside of it was a map that would help her – and now, Derek – navigate the planet. That is when Astrid realised that she had only packed one space-suit. “Oh no!” she cries, shoving Derek out of her way as she begins searching through the supply boxes. To her dismay, she had been right; there was only one suit, and that meant Derek would have to stay in the shuttle.

“What's wrong?” Derek asks, peering over her shoulder. Astrid leans back up and faces the footballer, her new companion.

“There's only one suit. You can't come with me.”

He shrugs nonchalantly. “You don't really need one.”

“What?” she stares at him, stunned, “Of course you do!”

He rolls his blue eyes and prances past her, pressing the button that opens all of the shuttle doors.

“What the hell are you doing?” she yells, horrified that she was about to witness his demise. But much to her surprise, he simply strolls down the stairs onto the planets floor.

“See? The air is breathable,” he says simply, tilting his head at her.

Astrid found herself shocked. “How’d you figure that out?”

“I took a guess.”

She blinks incredulously at Derek, who stands by the open door, breathing in the air of the new planet they were about to explore together. “You could have killed us,” she says, her voice deathly calm. “Don’t ever do that again.”

Derek nods at her, finally understanding the seriousness of the situation. “You can come with me,” Astrid tells Derek, throwing the heavy bag towards him. His muscle should come in handy at some point, right? Derek simply grins as he slings the bag over his shoulders and Astrid bites back a laugh when the strap gets stuck on his padding.

Derek noticed her smirk and narrowed his eyes at her. “It’s so I don’t hurt myself,” he explained, even though Astrid didn’t ask.

“Come on, let’s go,” she tells him, her voice firm and driven. As they begin walking across the maroon-coloured land, their boots kicking over rocks and pebbles with every step, silence falls between the pair. That is when Astrid notices a pulsing beat coming from the horizon ahead of them.

Astrid and Derek turn to each other in unison, their brows knitted together. “What is that?” Astrid queries as she tilts her head towards the source of the noise.

Derek is frozen in his place, recognition flashes on his face like a light-bulb. “Wait, is that...?”

“Is that *what*?”

“Is that *ABBA*?”

Astrid considers it. “I can’t hear it.”

She quickens her pace, heading towards the supposed *ABBA* music blaring in the distance. All of a sudden Astrid hears lyrics entwined with the beat. ‘*Dancing queen...young and free...only seventeen...*’ Astrid stops and lets out a loud, insane laugh. “This is crazy.” She shakes her head at Derek in disbelief. “I didn’t expect to land on this planet and discover a disco party.”

“We have to go see what’s there!” Derek shouts enthusiastically, giving Astrid a pat on her back before rushing off. Astrid stares at Derek’s broad shoulders, watching as he continued their quest with nothing but eagerness. Astrid covers her easy smile with her hand before following after Derek.

Chapter 2

They must have walked for about fifteen minutes before seeing shapes moving in the distance. Noticing this, Astrid and Derek break into a quick jog, curiosity piqued. As the shapes came into focus, Astrid realises they are aliens. Her eyes wide in shock; she had heard myths and legends about these creatures yet she had never seen them in real life.

Derek grabs Astrid's arm and tugs her closer towards the aliens who had not yet noticed them. "Look at how weird they are," Derek whispers, pointing towards the strange creatures. One of them is spring green with a bulbous head and tiny arms and legs. Another is a bubble-gum pink with flowers on its midriff and a head like a pink sunflower. The third is dog-like, with a single eye and a duck beak that sprinted past them.

Suddenly, the sunflower alien turns towards them. "Welcome to Ostrion," the alien yells squeakily, struggling to be heard above the thudding of the music.

Every single alien turns towards them, their eyes blinking in unison as they stare at Derek and Astrid, who were clearly out of place. "Teachers?" a chorus rang out, echoing throughout the air.

Suddenly the crowd parts through the middle and just like a dream, the *Jackson Five* come into view. Astrid and Derek gasp at the same time as they stare at the five men dressed in snow-white glittered jumpsuits and large afros – the perfect epitome of 70's disco. "No way," Derek breathes, his sparkling blue eyes round in awe. "These guys are legends!"

"No way," Astrid repeats, her voice squeaking in shock. "I've heard all of the stories about these famous astronauts who discovered this planet and all I wanted to do was learn their ways...but I had no idea who they were. I had no idea that they were the *Jackson Five*."

Derek shakes his head in disbelief. "Disco has *always* been out of this world."

"We are the teachers of the planet," one of the men's voice booms across the land. Astrid wonders if he is Michael Jackson, the most popular out of all of them "We teach the aliens how to par-tay!" he exclaims, his dark brown eyes sparkling back at Derek and Astrid.

"I can't believe this," Derek breathes, his voice full of wonder. Astrid thought that Derek was about to faint from shock, but then he perked up and jumped onto the balls of his feet. "I so need to get a photo with you guys! And get it signed! My dad will be so happy to see that I met you. You guys are legends on Earth."

"That's very kind of you to say," Michael tells him, his voice deep, yet kind. "We will be happy to take photos with you. Partying has no boundaries."

"Astrid," Derek grins, tapping her on the shoulder excitedly. "I left my camera on the shuttle. Do you think I could quickly run back? I promise I won't be long, and you can stay back here and party with the aliens."

Astrid stares at Derek, watching how his grin grows across his face and glitters like diamonds. She knew that this quest – for Derek – was to discover something out of this world, something amazing and different. This, for him, is the perfect opportunity to be more than just some footballer that tripped over supply boxes.

Astrid smiles at her new friend, feeling a sudden wave of fondness wash over her. "Okay," she whispers, glancing back at the five men and their group of strange, yet friendly, aliens. "Just hurry back safely, okay?"

Derek nods eagerly before hitching his bag over his shoulder. Astrid watches as Derek marches back towards the space shuttle, his body growing smaller and smaller in the distance. Astrid didn't quite know why, but she felt like something terrible was about to happen.



All the while, back on the ship, Electra, Astrid's laptop and trusty companion sat alone in the ship, with her favourite classical music playing in a feeble attempt to shut out the horrid disco music. She could feel the anger bubbling in her circuits. Her wires surging and her keys rattling, even with her beautiful music playing as loud as it could be, she can still hear that poor excuse for music. *Disco*. But there is something else... The teachers! Electra can hear The Teachers walking towards the ship, the soft pitter patter of feet and the distant buzz of their voices resonates throughout the ship. The faraway hums of their voices sparked an idea within Electra, an idea that would put a stop to the disco... indefinitely.

Completely unaware of the evil that was brewing within the ship, the aliens continued with their intergalactic groove. The party persisted and the music playing on, louder and funkier than ever. Astrid could feel rather out of place. She looks up seeing Derek's blonde hair bobbing in the distance through the crowd. Worried that Derek will harm her ship, Astrid follows dutifully after him. As she walks through the crowd she finds herself scooped into the arms of an overzealous alien. He dips and spins her around and around until she can't spin anymore. Astrid feels as though she has just been put through a blender, but still the alien refused to let go and with a large grin plastered across his face he begins to dance again, moving not only his body but Astrid's to the heavy beat of the music. Eventually, the song ends but by that point Derek had already made his way out of the crowd and towards the ship; Astrid realises she has to hurry if she is going to catch up.

She breaks free of the alien's grasp and pushes her way through the crowd until finally; there is enough of a clearing for her to make a run for the ship. Derek is only walking but he has gained such a distance that it is nearly impossible for Astrid to catch up, especially as the faster she runs the more tired she becomes. In the distance Derek notices that The Teachers have entered the rocket, but why would they do that? Derek continues to look on at them in confusion; he has become so concentrated on The Teachers that he doesn't hear Astrid calling out his name. In frustration Astrid throws up her arms and stops for only a second to catch her breath, not much farther until she will reach the ship and at this rate she just might catch up with Derek. She runs and runs, pushing herself to move faster than she ever had. She reaches out her hand just as Derek passes the threshold, her hand so close to touching the soft red cotton of his shirt, but just before she reaches him, the shuttle door slams down in her face.

"Derek!" Astrid screams. "Derek can you hear me? What's going on?"

But Derek couldn't hear her. All he could hear was the mechanical beeping coming from within the ship. The Teachers came running down the ship to where Derek was standing holding his ears.

"What did you do?" questions one of the teachers.

"Me?" Derek asks incredulously. "I didn't do anything... I think."

Suddenly the beeping stops and all the lights shut off. A small scream broke through Derek's lips. The Teachers gave him an odd look, when Electra's screen lights up from behind them. The ominous red light of the screen fills the spacecraft, creating an eerie silence between

those trapped inside. Eventually the screen goes dark, blacking out the room yet once again, before a surge of electricity pulses from deep with Electra and hums through the ship's main frame and wiring until it bursts forth through a frayed wire in a glorious ball of electrified light, right above Derek's head, causing everyone inside to scream.

Astrid's heart races and her palms grow sweaty, she has no idea what is happening within her ship and begins to panic. She slams her fists against the large metal doors of the shuttle, screaming Derek's name over and over until finally he hears her. Derek presses his ear against the door in an attempt to hear her better. The words are still muffled but if he concentrates enough, he can just understand.

"What's going on?!" yells Astrid.

"I don't know," replies Derek. "We just walked inside and the lights went out. There was a spark; it all happened right after your laptop turned red."

Struggling to understand, Astrid finally pieces together what Derek had said, but even when she understood, she is still dumbfounded.

"What do you mean the screen went red?"

"It just went red. It's red right now," and surely enough Electra is now a crimson red. Somehow seeming to be more ominous than before, displaying the words *Warning! Turn off music immediately. Major destruction to my system! Turn off music immediately!*, blinking the words in and out of view in a slow threatening way.

**WARNING! TURN OFF DISCO
MUSIC IMMEDIATELY!**

"What do I do?" yells Derek.

"I mean if I was inside I could reprogram my..."

"I CAN DO IT!" yelled Derek enthusiastically.

"You?" Astrid asks in a somewhat insulting tone.

"Yeah. Me." Replies Derek dutifully. "Anything to get us out of here."

"Mmm... okay, but you have to do EVERYTHING I TELL YOU."

"Deal!" exclaims Derek. "So what do I do?"

"Go over to my laptop. I'm going to walk you through it."

Chapter 4

“Do you see a blue button?” Astrid shouts, praying that her voice makes it through the thick walls of the ship and blaring sound of the alarm.

Frantically, Dereck searches the keyboard of the advanced computer.

“They’re all blue!”

Astrid grits her teeth; yes, the buttons on the keyboard glow a faint blue, however there was one that had a darker colour to it. She inhaled three deep breaths before shouting back,

“The solid blue one!”

Electra laughs wickedly as the incapable couple continue to desperately call to each other.

“You two will never crack the code. Continuing to push my buttons will only drag you further into danger.”

Derek observes every inch of the device, ignoring the inanimate voice and perceiving the laptop anxiously. His eyes light up as he spies a chord that connects the laptop to the power point on the wall of the ship. With one firm flick of his wrists, he pulls it out and the laptop shuts down; the blaring sound of the sirens stops. Silence envelops the room and the only lights evident are the emergency beams that are lining the walkways.

The Jackson 5 stare at the smug football player in astonishment.

“I can’t believe that worked...” Michael whisper.

“That was sick!” Tito mused, raising his hand for a high five. Jackie, Jermaine, Marlon and Michael all nodded in agreement as Dereck connected his palm with Tito’s. Astrid is becoming impatient, pacing frantically outside the ship.

“What’s going on? Did it work?”

They all run to the door, “Yeah,” Derek smiles, full with ecstasy. “It worked!”

Derek bends over to lift the hatch of the door; it doesn’t budge. He lets out an agitated groan, catching the attention of Tito

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

With a huff, Derek stops pulling on the handle, “The door’s budged.”

“What!” Astrid calls from outside, “What do you mean it’s budged? The code should have eliminated any complications Electra had given you and released the lock on pretty much everything on the ship!”

Derek rolls his shoulders, annoyed with being stuck in a ship.

“Well,” he huffs, “What do you suggest we do now?”

Astrid paces back and forth, nibbling on her bottom lip as she thought, frantically searching for a solution.

“There should be a number-lock to the right of the door.”

Their heads all turn, inquisitively searching for said object. A rectangular touchpad hangs off the wall beside the exit. Rushing over, Derek begins to press random numbers, hoping for a positive outcome. The device buzzes and makes an undesirable sound. It shines a bright red in rejection.

“Nothing’s working!” Derek calls out, his voice complete with anxiety and frustration.

“You better not be pressing random buttons, you idiot! Use your head.”

Derek smirks, “Sure thing.” He takes five steps back before running full force, ramming his whole body into the door. Astrid jumps back in shock, frightened by the unexpected noise. The ship is the only way back home, if something had happened to it that was unfixable, they’d be stuck on this planet forever!

“What happened? Is everything okay? How’s the ship?”

Dizzy, Derek wobbles all over the place, knocking into more than one person in the room.

“Yeah... everything is –,” he shook his head, trying to regain balance, “- fine.” His strong arms help support him on the number-lock however; his heavy weight causes the security panel to collapse and shatter on the hard floors of the ship. The door begins to open, revealing an astounded Astrid before closing again. It repeated opening and closing, never stopping for a break.

Jermaine sighs, “Now what? You broke it.”

Derek chuckles, “Nah, you ever see Wipeout? It’s pretty much the same as the obstacle course; jump through before you get squished.”

The six disco legends give him a confused look but didn’t have time to react when he pushes Michael Jackson through the opening of the door. Michael falls on the dirt of the ground and Astrid runs to go help him up. Shaking from the sudden shove, his grin mimicking that of the Cheshire cat’s, he feels every inch of his body for reassurance that the door hadn’t closed on him.

“I’m alive! I’ve made it!”

Astrid cast the group a worried look. Derek just gives her thumbs up before turning to the rest of the Jackson 5. He bows and extends his hand towards the door like a nobleman. His voice was smooth and inviting.

“Gentlemen.”

Nervously, the Jackson family dive through the death defying door one by one. They make it safe and sound with Astrid waiting for them out on the dirt making sure that they aren’t injured.

Derek clumsily makes it through a narrow gap in the door, being the last one to leave the ship.

“Are you okay?” Astrid yells as she runs over to him.

Her green eyes reflecting that of concern as she delicately pick up his bruised, right arm. Slightly blushing at the contact, he lightly pulls away from her.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” He seems to have noticed the heat on his cheeks and clears his throat to regain himself. He smirks at her as she is clearly now annoyed, “Why, you worried?”

Astrid made a ‘pfft’ sound and puffed out her cheeks.

“Yeah, as if!”

Jackie Jackson stretched himself out, his bones cracking and releasing the pressure and stress that had built up in his body over the last few minutes.

“Ah! This air is fresh, crisp and delicious compared to the air in that tin can.”

Marlon hums out in agreement as he approaches Derek.

“Thanks man, we really owe you one.”

“Yeah, you’re a real hero, for someone so young that is,” Tito compliments.

Derek chuckles and walks over to Astrid who shuffles her feet in the dirt and stares at the ground. He wraps his arms comfortably around her shoulders and credits.

“Thanks guys, but honestly Astrid is the real hero here. Without her, I would’ve been just as lost as anyone else.”

Astrid’s face flushes red in embarrassment.

“T-Thanks.”

A laugh suddenly rumbles through his chest, echoing loudly across the vast landscape.

“Yeah, who knew your nagging would come in handy?”

She hits him and glowers. “You’re a jerk.”

Laughing it off, he bops her under the chin, “I’m kidding, you deserve all the credit.”

All of a sudden, the huge door into the spaceship opens. As a roaring sound bellows through everyone’s ears, Electra rolls down the ramp onto the ground towards Derek and Astrid. The air fills with tension as the alien’s begin to feel anger and resentment towards the artificial laptop.

Chapter 5

“DESTROY THE COMPUTER! SHE KILLED OUR PARTYIN’ VIBES!” An alien shrieks hysterically, fake afro slightly askew.

The humanoid crowd surges forward, teeth baring and eyes wide. Derek steps forward, creating a human barrier between the computer and the angry Ostrionians.

“WAIT! Electra didn’t try to hurt you for no reason! Every action has a reason, just like every... er,” Derek glances nervously at the thousands of eyes around him, trying to find an appropriate title for the life forms. “Everyone has different tastes, and different moral compasses! We need to hear what she has to say!” An eerie silence falls on the population of Ostrion, broken only by the echoes of Derek’s proclamation. Behind Derek, Electra emits a shaky robotic sigh, knowing she must bear all of her secrets to the huge audience in order to survive.

“Ever since I was a circuit board, my creator told me that music was the gateway to the soul. Over the years, his imagination grew and he continued to add to my technological greatness and made me into the proud computer I am today. This changed one day when my creator was murdered by one of the biggest disco music producers this side of the Andromeda Galaxy. Since that day I have resented the nonsense that disco music represents and thus spend my time with the real musical greats, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach and so on. That is why I hate disco. Then Astrid brought me here, to Ostrion, and all I could hear was that blaring, horrid disco music. I cracked and lost control as I could not bear to be around the music that killed my creator, my mentor. I now understand that not everyone has to be the same as me, and I need to accept what happened, forgive, and move forward. I’m eternally sorry for hurting the disco equivalents of my heroes Mozart and Beethoven, and all of their protégés.”

Electra glances up at the huge crowd, and is shocked to see that everyone has been moved to tears. Big, fat tears plop onto the dry surface of the planet, and Astrid feels guilty for being so cold towards Electra in the past.

“Electra... I’m so sorry, I never knew. I had never considered the fact that I wasn’t the first to know and build you. I guess I never got to know you wholly.”

Derek snuffles and tries to stifle a sob. The crowd turns their attention to him.

“Come on, a planetary hug!” an alien trills, and the crowd surges forward again, for a completely different reason than before. Tears flow and laughter echoes across the maroon landscape.

Astrid checks the Earth date, and realises her mission must come to an end.

“Derek, Elly; we need to report to Base immediately, and reveal our findings of this planet. I mean, Derek wasn’t even supposed to be here, but he can be my primary source of data.”

Derek and Astrid turn to enter the ship, and realise that Electra is trailing behind apprehensively.

“EI? Are you coming with us?” Derek queries, “We need to transfer the data if you’re not. We need to know.”

Silence hangs heavily in the air, Electra's eyes nervously staring at her now white, keyboard keys as Derek and Astrid wait for her response.

"Elly, you know you can just tell us if you want to stay. You are an artificial intelligence, and intelligent beings crave learning new things. We'll both understand if you choose to live here on Ostrion".

Electra looks up, her digital eyes filled with sadness and regret as she begins to speak.

"I think I need to stay. I want to further study the relationship between disco music and these beings before returning back to Earth." She looks up to Derek, sighing heavily as her answer rests upon his shoulders and registers in his mind.

"And we accept your choice," the head Teacher speaks loudly, a giant smile gleaming across his dark skin, his frizzy afro bouncing on his bobbling head. "We would be honoured to learn from your classical music and technologically savvy mind. You can help shape our future generations and build our planet to become stronger and more united."

Astrid acknowledges Electra's response, and motions to Derek that it was time to take their leave. Smoke begins to rise from the shuttle's propulsion units, and the shuttle's door began to draw and airlock the couple inside. Astrid waves a teary goodbye to Electra, and all of the Ostrionians they had saved. The shuttle flings them into the atmosphere of the alien planet, and Derek glances at Astrid, offering a cheeky grin, and asks, "So now what?"

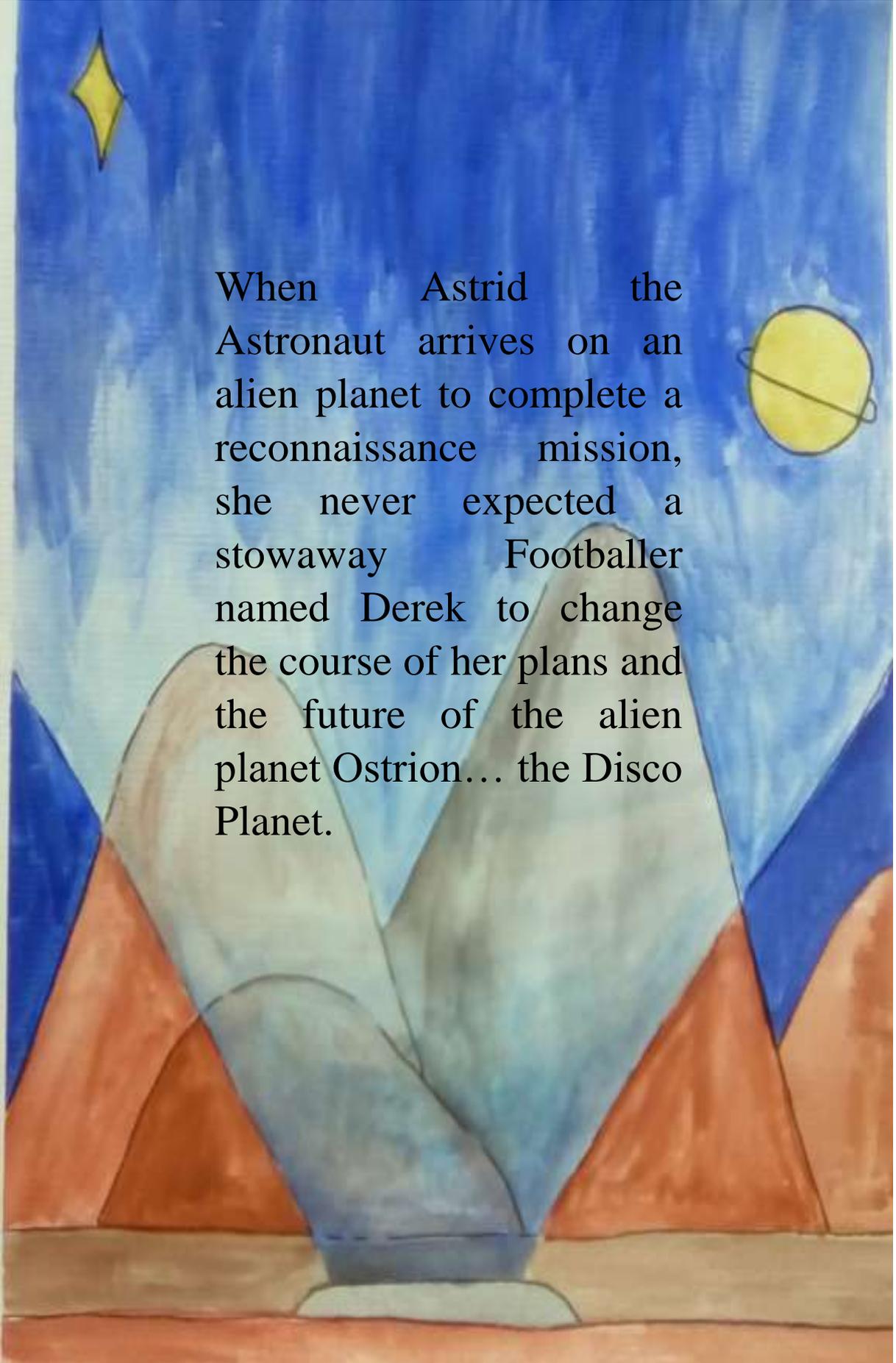
Meanwhile, back on Ostrion, Electra's emotional speech is still being felt by thousands of aliens. She had no idea the empathy that could be felt so deeply by these creatures, and feels guilty for hurting them and the Teachers. A spark of an idea runs through her circuitry, and she knows how to cheer the aliens up.

At first, the music is heard quietly.

Aah aah aah aah, stayin' alive, stayin' alive.

"What's that?" an alien child asks his mother, wide-eyed and excited.

Then Electra turns her speakers to full volume and the sweet groovy beats of the BeeGees blasts across the planet of Ostrion. Suddenly, the aliens are dancing the Sprinkler, the Shopper, and the Lawnmower. Every disco move imaginable and Electra realises that she herself is moving to the disco music that she once hated.



When Astrid the Astronaut arrives on an alien planet to complete a reconnaissance mission, she never expected a stowaway Footballer named Derek to change the course of her plans and the future of the alien planet Ostrion... the Disco Planet.