

I don't look back at the complex and I decide not to take the rover. Normally, the rovers are oxygenated and we're never to bring the cylinders out into the field. It's heavier than I expected, even though it has barely enough oxygen to get me to where I'm headed, but it adds the weight I need to feel myself sink even deeper, step by step, into this sarcophagus of a planet. This sterile wasteland. I feel like I'm defiling it with my beating heart and my blood-filled flesh, like a criminal rapist penetrating a world without its consent. Bringing life where it was never meant to exist.

I look up at the brown sky. It's so beige, it almost looks like skin. I imagine the sky as skin pulled drum tight around the planet and I picture myself throwing a dart into it, Zeus-like, lethally puncturing it, and watching as a hole opens up and rains down a torrent of blood. I picture the sky as living entity and I want to maim it. I want to watch as its great vastness bleeds out and empties itself of life right in front of me.

Once surrounded by lifelessness for long enough, everything starts to seem like it's alive. A comfort to the dying man, a type of mercy, maybe, but it only fills me with rage and resentment, and I start running. The brown sand stretches on for what seems like forever. All emptiness. No life anywhere, nothing else capable of bleeding except for me.

The great expanse meant something to me once. An opportunity, hope. Discovery. That's what kept us all going, the big motivation to keep striving forward. "One day, we'll find something that will truly change things forever." "We'll discover something that will change mankind for all time." Always something grand, something revolutionary. The expanse was just waiting to be remade in the eyes of man. It's desertedness a kind of temptation. New resources, new organisms, more landmass.

Now, as I'm running into the reddish-brown nothingness, in barrens so devoid of form and life that it seems as though I'm running in place, I see nothing but mockery. I see a calm serenity of emptiness that ridicules me for all the noise of life that I've lived, for all the toxins lodged in the rotting meat I call a body. For thinking that my life and all my memories had any meaning. Its deafening silence and my loudness, my smallness and its greatness sneers at me for daring to exist at all.

When I look at the vast desert of the planet, I see absolutely nothing. It's lifelessness and my aliveness increase my rage and the tears begin to well up and fall across my red, sweat beaded face. I keep running, faster. The oxygen tank digs into my back with each step and I pull the handle of the axe closer to my chest to keep it from swinging in front of me. The despair at being abandon by the universe that has brought me into existence fuels me as I get closer and close to my destination.

Finally, I reach the edge of the valley. Inside my helmet, I can only hear my own breathing and the hiss of the oxygen. Running decreased its oxygen volume substantially. I have less than thirty minutes to execute my plan.

Calm now, holding the axe tightly between my gloved hands, I look out again at the sky and the land surrounding me. No life, no plants, no water, no buildings. Only shades of red. The color scheme of an inverted earth.

I had spent the last 2 weeks holed up in my room, immersed in AR landscapes of earth but with a modification to alter the colors of the projections. Brown water, beige sky, red grass. I wanted to see life as if it were dead, as if it were living when it shouldn't be.

For a moment, on the edge of the valley with a drop of nearly 200 meters, I think about anyone that might be left on earth, born into their very tombs. Playing on an electrified stage like they're dolls with faulty circuits that will inevitably break at any time. The faces of people I thought loved flash in my mind and they're all smiling. I see a close-up image of my [■■■■] and I notice the pores of their skin, the reflection of the imaginary light illuminating their smiling face and I feel nausea beginning to spin inside my the center of my stomach.

There is nothing I would say to them now. When I left earth, I told them that I was spreading life into the universe. I was making history. My name would be in the annals of human history for as long as humans would exist. We were on the precipice of a truly new world. Centuries of writers and theorists had postulated what it would be like to colonize Mars and I was one of the unfathomably lucky few to

turn this collective dream into a concrete reality. Mars would help us generate more energy, there would be more exploitable resources, more land for farming, more land for more humans to survive. It wouldn't be like what had happened on the moon, where excessive and disputed helium mining led to the first lunar and terrestrial war. Mars was going to be utopian. Under the control of an international space organization: regulated, harmonized. There wasn't going to be resource extraction disputes here, at least not if the treaties signed after the first space war were to be respected. I wasn't just some space miner, I was a pioneer, meant to seed life, terraform the planet, study it, adapt humanity to it.

Less than twenty minutes left. I'm wasting my last moments thinking about the planet that has long forgotten me. The living planet floating in a sea of nothingness, untouched by any life outside of it. A petri dish preserving cancer. I look down, try to ground myself. There are only inches between me and the face of the cliff. Red sand stirs below like grainy noise in the nearly flat image of pure color that envelops me. The sky remains that heavy beige.

I see nothing, just the bland colors that have lost their awe-striking power months ago.

I realized back then that life wasn't meant to be spread. That I wasn't spreading the gift of life, but I was spreading the pain of death. And not only that, but that life itself was morally reprehensible. The mere existence of life was a pathological anomaly. The probes we sent out into deep space. The satellites we sent to Saturn's moons, all brought back nothing. Radio signals ended up being reverberations of highly magnetized stars. Everywhere, there was nothing. I felt sick with myself for my past idealism. That I swallowed it for so long, that it's what drove me to commit to flying to Mars. The harm I had caused by planting life here. Violating a planet never asked to support life, forcing life to dominate it, to suck whatever material could be siphoned out. A parasite, all life, and not just humans. Life is the sign of decay and rot. I would ask myself if perhaps it were not that the universe had birthed humanity, only so that we could help accelerate its termination? But just as quickly, I would run out of any sympathy for the cosmos to feel.

Once I came to the conclusion that life was inherently immoral, I was immediately sent to cognitive maintenance therapy. I was fed the same line of thinking as I had once so blindly believed. But I couldn't see it anymore, I couldn't tolerate it. The more they pushed me to agree that our work was indisputably near the summit of all human achievement, that what we were doing was good, that it was all for the benefit of humanity, all for humanity, the more resentment I began to feel.

Until last night, when I went to the room of each of my team members and I bashed their faces in with an axe. Twelve in total, I'll be thirteenth.

I turn away from the valley and face the vast, red desert plain. The hiss of the oxygen audibly slows. If I don't do it soon, I'll suffocate in my helmet. But I want my blood on these sands. I want my body to rot here and my brains exposed. I want my skeleton to be buried under the sands of an alien planet, so far from its original host. I'll violate this inhabitable emptiness one last time and I'll do it with my own blood. If life wasn't meant to exist here, I will force it to adapt and submit life's decay.

I look up at the beige sky. The sun softly glows through my gold coated helmet. I get on my knees and brush my gloved hand across the sand one last time before removing my helmet, and in the milliseconds before my capillaries freeze,

Getting down on my knees, I look up at the beige sky and the softly glowing sun one last time before retracting the gold coated glass helmet. In the milliseconds before my capillaries burst, I bring the axe overhead and bash my face in.

XOXO
- Saturnette