

OUTPOST
by Alexander Utz

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OUTPOST

CHARACTERS:

ARIS. A third-generation Martian. (W/NB, early 20s.)

LIAM. A third-generation Martian. (M/NB, early 20s.)

JO. A third-generation Martian. (W/NB, early 20s.)

TRISH. A first-generation Martian. (W/NB, early 20s.)

TIME: Someday.

PLACE: Mars.

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Darkness. The interior of a Martian colony compound. It's the older part of the compound. Uninhabited. It hasn't seen care in some time. ARIS, LIAM, and JO enter. Jo is carrying a backpack. They look around.

ARIS. Anyone else just get the chills?

LIAM. I've never seen it this dark.

JO. Watch out, all the ghosts are going to get you.

LIAM. Don't say that.

JO. Boo!

LIAM. I'm going to kill you.

JO. Not if the ghosts do first.

ARIS. Do you think the MARVIN in here still works?

LIAM. I think it was only programmed to do the presentation. They might've shut it down already.

JO. You think we'll hear the voice?

ARIS. I hope so.

LIAM. What voice?

ARIS. MARVIN? Can you give us some light?

LIAM. What voice? (*Lights come on and a computer's voice is heard: MARVIN.*)

MARVIN. Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian civilization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement —

ARIS. That's okay, MARVIN. We just wanted the lights. No presentation today.

MARVIN. When is the next presentation?

ARIS. — I don't know.

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LIAM. You want to tell it?

ARIS. It'll figure it out.

JO. (*Sarcastic.*) Yeah, we don't want to hurt the robot's feelings.

ARIS. I'm being considerate. It turned on the lights for us.

LIAM. And look at that! No ghosts.

JO. I wouldn't be so sure about that, Liam.

LIAM. I'm not letting you scare me, Jo.

JO. No? You look pretty scared to me.

ARIS. Are we five? We came here to see this one last time, let's not spend the whole time bickering about ghosts.

JO. We're just having some fun.

ARIS. It's always crazy to me, thinking that people actually lived in here. That my grandma lived here.

LIAM. (*Looking around the space.*) Yeah it is. It's so — basic. How did they keep themselves from getting bored?

JO. Don't you remember? (*Imitating a part of MARVIN's presentation that they all know.*) "For fun, they played a game, imagining —"

ALL. "What life might have been like on Earth."

LIAM. Classic.

JO. (*Looking around the space.*) You think we'll find anything worth keeping?

LIAM. I hope we find those swords.

JO. Ooo, yes! Can you imagine what holding one of those things is like?

LIAM. I'd feel like such a badass.

JO. I think you have to know how to use it before you can be a badass.

LIAM. I'd figure it out.

ARIS. I want to find one of those old-school, original helmets. My grandma had one of those.

LIAM. What happened to it?

ARIS. She was buried with it.

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LIAM. Right, right.

JO. There has to be one here. It doesn't look like anyone's cleaned this place out yet.

LIAM. You think they would've by now.

ARIS. Who knows what they're planning to do.

JO. Who, leadership? Probably planning to screw us with a really hard Test tomorrow, for one.

ARIS. Yeah, how are we feeling about that?

JO. I thought we were coming here to not think about it.

LIAM. You brought it up.

ARIS. Kind of hard not to think about it. It's a big deal. It's our whole future.

LIAM. I bet it's going to be the hardest Test they've ever given.

ARIS. My grandma said her Test was pretty hard.

JO. Yeah, but she was, like, the first person who ever took it, right? I'm sure it was bad back then, but they've definitely gotten worse.

ARIS. What do you want to be assigned?

JO. I thought we weren't talking about it?

LIAM. I'd want to work on projects to explore other planets. For sure.

ARIS. That would be cool.

JO. (*Joking.*) You think you can handle another planet? You're scared of this one!

LIAM. I'm not scared!

JO. Uh huh.

LIAM. It would be so great. I'd get to find new places, name them, be one of the first people to see them. Find out if they can support human life or not —

JO. You know there hasn't been a project like that since Mission Return, right? (*Aris flinches.*) Making it back to Earth is pretty much impossible. Good luck making it to new planets.

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LIAM. I know, I know, I just think it would be interesting. What about you, Aris?

ARIS. My number one is to be an engineer, of some sort. Build what the compound needs, you know? Make it better. Make sure nothing goes wrong.

JO. Alright. No more talking about the Test. That's the whole point of tonight, yeah?

ARIS. Okay, okay, we'll stop.

JO. Thank you.

ARIS. *After* you tell us what you want to be assigned.

JO. I mean, I don't even know why we still have to take a Test. At this point, shouldn't Leadership already know who we are and what we're good at?

ARIS. All I'm asking is what interests you most. You could be anything you want.

LIAM. Right, because "The frontier is a place —"

ALL. "Of endless possibilities."

JO. Ugh. I hate when they say that. (*Jo opens the backpack and takes out three beers.*) Shall we? (*Aris and Liam each take one.*)

ARIS. Here's to becoming Real Martians tomorrow. May we all get the assignments we want.

LIAM. Hear hear.

JO. May we meet all the ghosts we want.

ARIS. Hear hear!

LIAM. I don't want to drink to that —

JO. (*Calling out.*) Hey, ghosts, Liam here really wants to meet you!

LIAM. No, no, we've already established there aren't any — (*A loud sound from another part of the compound. They all freeze. The lights flicker out. The chorus of "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple*

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Minds plays, through MARVIN.) Oh my god. Oh my god, Jo. What did you do?

JO. That was — perfect timing.

ARIS. Lights back on, MARVIN. (*The lights flicker back on, and the music stops.*)

MARVIN. Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian —

ARIS. No, MARVIN, still no presentation today.

MARVIN. Standing by.

ARIS. — Okay. You do that.

LIAM. So. Do we leave now, or —?

JO. (*To Liam.*) Oh wow, you do *not* look well.

ARIS. It's an old part of the compound. It was probably pipes, or something.

LIAM. And the lights?

ARIS. I don't know. There aren't ghosts, Liam.

JO. Except there *is* a story about this part of the compound...

ARIS. Jo.

JO. What? You know this one, right?

ARIS. Of course I do. But let's not scare him anymore.

LIAM. It's fine. I'm fine. I'm just going to — sit and do some deep breathing for like, thirty minutes.

JO. Brave. So can I tell the story?

ARIS. Jo!

JO. What else are we going to do? Sit here and stare at each other?

Listen to Liam's deep breathing?

LIAM. You can tell the story, Jo.

JO. Really?

ARIS. Really?

JO. I didn't think it would be that easy.

LIAM. Let's get it over with.

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JO. Okay. So. You know how there were the three people living in this compound when the Second Landing arrived? Like, fifty years ago?

LIAM. Yeah, Aris's grandma and the other two Elders, what were their names —

ARIS. Alan and Denver.

LIAM. Yeah. They were the first three people born on Mars.

JO. Well there was a fourth person too.

ARIS. You've never heard this story?

LIAM. I just knew the three of them were here for the Second Landing.

JO. Right. But there were supposed to be four. The day they all passed their Test, they were given helmets and suits and allowed to go outside for the first time. They hadn't seen their parents in a few years; gone out on a mission and never came back. So the four of them decided to go out on the surface and find their folks. And they walk for a while before they see it on the horizon — the wreckage of a rover.

LIAM. No.

JO. Yes. And as they got closer, they found something truly horrible: the remains of their parents inside. No survivors.

ARIS. Grandma said it was the worst day of her life.

JO. One of them took it worse than the others. Her name was Trish. She ran off on her own. The others tried to get back to their rover to find her, but they were heading straight into a terrible dust storm. They had to turn back and get to the safety of the compound, leaving her on the surface with a dwindling oxygen supply, and hoping they could try again soon.

LIAM. Oh my god. Did they?

JO. No. The dust storm only got worse. They never found her.

LIAM. That's — awful.

JO. But there is a rumor that they did end up finding her body, and when their food supply started getting low —

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LIAM. They ate her??

ARIS. That's not true.

JO. It could be.

ARIS. You're basically saying my grandma ate her friend.

JO. Okay, maybe your *grandma* didn't, but the others could have!

ARIS. They didn't eat her. My parents said that when they were young, the story used to be that Trish made it back to the compound with the others, but stopped talking to anyone. Stopped eating, stopped doing anything. Then one night she just walked out onto the surface without her suit or helmet. And disappeared.

JO. Either way, now her ghost roams this compound, the place where she was once happy. And sometimes, her voice is heard whispering and laughing through these walls. Some people say that's the real reason this old compound is being destroyed.

LIAM. Oh. Wow.

JO. How do you feel?

LIAM. — Scared.

JO. Ha. I can tell by the look on your face.

LIAM. Is it true? About Trish?

ARIS. I don't know.

JO. Your grandma never told you?

ARIS. She didn't like to talk about her life before the Second Landing.

JO. Well. It's a good story, though, yeah?

LIAM. That's why you wanted to come here tonight, isn't it?

JO. He figured it out!

ARIS. We probably won't hear anything.

JO. It's just for fun anyway. It'll only be MARVIN. It's not like we'll be in danger, or anything.

ARIS. Yeah, we're having fun! Last night before our Test, let's make it one to remember.

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JO. How'd you ever have fun before you met us, Liam?

LIAM. Honestly, who knows.

JO. I wish the presentation had a ghost story in it. Ghosts are part of Mars history!

ARIS. It's probably not a real story, though.

LIAM. I'm sure leadership just wanted to focus on the good stuff anyway. "Endless possibilities" and all that.

JO. The boring stuff.

LIAM. I remember coming here with the class, to watch it. I always wished they talked more about the Founders' lives on Earth, before they came here.

JO. Even more boring. I always slept through it.

ARIS. I always had to shake you awake.

JO. I hated when you did that.

LIAM. I guess it's a little sad that they're shutting it down for good.

ARIS. I don't know, it's not like anyone was using it anymore. Nobody really cares.

JO. It's for the better. This whole part of the colony can be scrapped and used to build new things that we actually need.

ARIS. Right. Old stuff like this doesn't matter anymore. *(The lights flicker off. MARVIN plays a portion of "Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds again.)*

LIAM. Why does that keep happening?

JO. You don't think we upset it, do you?

ARIS. I don't know, maybe it wasn't too thrilled to find out it's being scrapped for parts —

LIAM. Oh, I know. You're messing with me, aren't you?

JO. Ha. Why didn't we think of that, Aris?

ARIS. That would've been a great idea. *(The song stutters and fades. The lights stay off.)*

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LIAM. So how do we get the lights back on?

JO. How are we supposed to know?

LIAM. I don't know, you're the one who set this up.

JO. I swear we didn't!

ARIS. I think something's going on with the MARVIN.

LIAM. MARVIN? Can we get the lights back on, please? We didn't mean to upset you.

JO. I can't believe we're apologizing to a robot.

LIAM. It's MARVIN.

JO. An old, out-of-date MARVIN. A presentation MARVIN. It just repeats the same things over and over again. It's not useful or anything.
(The lights flicker back on. More colorful now.)

LIAM. There we go.

MARVIN. Hello, fellow Martians, and welcome. Please take a seat. The final presentation begins now.

JO. MARVIN, we said we don't want to see —

MARVIN. Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian civilization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement offers a glimpse into how the first humans on Mars lived. But first, how did we get here?

JO. I can't believe this.

LIAM. What are we supposed to do? Can we stop it?

JO. MARVIN, stop!

LIAM. There aren't even any actors. It won't be the same.

MARVIN. This initial portion of the compound, as well as the biosphere, was constructed remotely from Earth, and took over thirty years to complete. The MARs Virtual Intelligence Network — you know me as MARVIN — was developed to facilitate communications, monitor food growth and water supply, and maintain atmospheric conditions safe for human survival, among a host of other capabilities.

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JO. (*Overlapping during MARVIN's speech.*) Do we just have to sit through this?

ARIS. Why don't we play along? We could be the actors.

LIAM. Oh, yeah, we should!

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Once it was finished, a crew of eight Earthlings boarded the spacecraft Shepard, to open a new chapter of human history. They would be the first permanent residents of Mars. (*Aris, Liam, and Jo reflexively speak with MARVIN.*) Strap in, pioneers.

JO. Can't we just chill and have a drink?

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Blast off in ten — nine —

ARIS. We'll have drinks and play along with it. It'll get our minds off the Test for sure.

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Eight — seven —

LIAM. Plus, we can keep props from the show! You can get your helmet, Aris.

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Six — five —

ARIS. Yes! What do you say, Jo?

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Four —

ARIS. I bet you'll have more fun than you think.

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Three —

LIAM. Maybe we'll find those swords, too!

MARVIN. (*Continuing.*) Two —

JO. Fine! Fine. Let's do it.

ARIS. Yay!

MARVIN. One. (*Aris, Liam, and Jo sit down and pretend to strap in. The lights grow even more bright and colorful. The room rumbles.*) And we have lift-off.

LIAM. (*Half joking.*) Ooo, lift off! Next stop, Mars!

JO. I already regret this.

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LIAM. “Alright, crew, this is your captain speaking. We’re on our way.”

MARVIN. They climbed higher and higher into the Earth’s atmosphere and toward the void of space.

ARIS. The actors usually talk here, don’t they?

LIAM. You mean the crew.

JO. Oh my god.

LIAM. I’m putting us in the moment!

ARIS. Right, right — they talk about the view!

LIAM. What a spectacular view!

ARIS. God, look at that moon!

LIAM. We should record this. (*Liam pretends to take pictures.*)

JO. What are you doing?

LIAM. Taking pictures. Filming. (*Liam turns the “camera” on Jo. Think “dad on vacation” vibes.*) Where are we?

JO. Stop.

ARIS. It’s okay to play along, Jo. Geez.

LIAM. (*Turning the “camera” toward himself.*) We’re going to Mars.

MARVIN. These brave explorers would spend the next seven months aboard the Shepard, traveling over ninety million miles to their new lives on the Red Planet. Can you imagine what they might have been feeling?

ARIS. — Oh. This is the discussion part.

JO. We don’t actually have to discuss, do we?

ARIS. Yes! We have to “inhabit the past!”

LIAM. They must’ve been scared. And excited. They must have been thinking about all they’d leave behind: their loved ones, family and friends, their favorite restaurants and comfort foods, their movie theatres and their art galleries, the trees and the flowers and the grass beneath their feet. And how it would all be worth it for what lay ahead.

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ARIS. I wonder if they thought about how they would never again be outside without a helmet on.

LIAM. I bet they thought about being forever remembered as the first humans to settle another planet.

ARIS. They were probably thinking about the last hugs they gave their family.

LIAM. (*Teasing?*) And if that would ever be enough.

JO. We'll never know what they were thinking. There's no point in speculating.

ARIS. The point is to empathize a bit.

JO. I thought the point was to make fun of it.

ARIS. Yeah, that too.

JO. You want to know what they probably thought? I bet it was "Wow, I'm going to be on Mars in a few months and I feel totally unprepared. What was I thinking?"

MARVIN. Finally, after two hundred and eleven days of travel, they began making their final approach. The surface of Mars loomed closer and closer, bright and rocky and orange.

LIAM. It's the wrong size.

JO. What?

LIAM. That's what they usually say at this part. It's the wrong size.

ARIS. It's too big.

LIAM. Right, yes. I'm too used to it being a small bright pinpoint in the sky. I knew it was a whole planet, conceptually. I pictured this moment a million times. Landing. But — it's still bigger than I ever thought.

ARIS. Seeing it get bigger and bigger, right in front of you — that's when it feels real.

JO. I wonder what it looked like.

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LIAM. There are the old pictures. The slight curvature of the surface, radiating against the void. The white blip of the compound in the distance.

JO. Yeah, but it's not the same. The picture doesn't give you the same feeling as being there.

MARVIN. They landed, and stepped out onto the surface of their new home. *(The lights go orange. The sound of wind on the surface. Three space helmets appear.)*

ARIS. Ooo, it's actually happening!

LIAM. I knew it would! Let's see how it looks. *(Aris takes a helmet and puts it on.)*

ARIS. Does it suit me?

LIAM. It's perfect.

ARIS. Thank you. — This smells really bad, I have to take it off. *(Aris takes her helmet off. Liam and Jo smell their helmets, wince.)*

JO. Yikes. It's like fifty years of bad, hot breath.

ARIS. MARVIN, were these ever cleaned between presentations?
(Pause.)

JO. Yeah, we're not getting an answer to that. Are you going to keep yours?

ARIS. Why not? A helmet's a helmet. It'll be a good souvenir. *(Liam has closed his eyes, listening to the sound of wind.)*

LIAM. If you close your eyes, you can almost imagine you're there.

MARVIN. Looking out from the compound, they faced the untarnished frontier of a new planet, untouched by humans.

ARIS. Jo — remember when we were kids, we'd look out the window from my room and pretend we were standing out there, feeling the wind?

JO. We were so lame.

ARIS. It was your idea.

JO. Yeah, it was lame.

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LIAM. You never did that with me. It sounds fun.

ARIS. Anyway, whenever we did, Jo would complain about it being dumb that we can't be on the surface until after our Test.

JO. It is. How are we supposed to prepare for it?

ARIS. So. Close your eyes. Pretend you're there.

JO. — Fine. (*Jo closes their eyes.*)

ARIS. What's the surface like?

JO. It's — empty.

LIAM. Come on, Jo. We know you don't want to do this, but —

JO. No, I mean it. It's empty and I can imagine it feeling huge and alien. It still kind of feels alien to me sometimes, which is weird. I've lived here my whole life and sometimes it feels like it's still new. I don't know. It's that feeling when you remember there's a whole planet to explore.

ARIS. I always thought about that. The feeling of being on the precipice. The beginning of something.

LIAM. “The frontier is a place...”

ARIS. Exactly.

LIAM. Sometimes I wish I could've been an explorer on Earth.

JO. Genocidal and colonialist?

LIAM. No — just to discover new places. Then go home. I'm a few generations too late for here, and *way* too late for Earth.

ARIS. You could still explore here. Definitely.

LIAM. And find a lot of mountains and craters that have already been named.

ARIS. Maybe you'll make it to Earth one day.

LIAM. Return trips? In our lifetime? After what happened to Mission Return?

ARIS. Who knows what could happen. You've been talking about Earth as long as we've been friends. Don't rule it out.

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LIAM. — Okay. Yeah. I won't. (*Aris closes her eyes, takes a deep breath.*)

ARIS. I think of the relief they must have felt. Finally getting here. Finally feeling it beneath their feet. That they wouldn't have to prove anything to anyone anymore.

JO. Well, they had to prove they could survive.

MARVIN. As much as they wanted to explore their new home, there was work to do in the compound. There was research to be done, planning for future settlements, and more. Aside from simply adjusting to life on a new planet.

LIAM. “Putting on a full suit and helmet every time you go outdoors.”

JO. Hold on, is this the list of things?

LIAM. You know it.

JO. This was always the part I would wake up for.

ARIS. Just to laugh at it.

JO. You laughed at it too! How could anyone take it seriously? “Going to sleep under a moonless sky.”

LIAM. “Eating a meatless diet.”

ARIS. “Except for canned food.”

LIAM. Except for canned food! I forgot about that one.

JO. Ha. Makes them sound like cats.

LIAM. (*Wistful.*) I wish we had cats.

ARIS. “Having the eyes of the entire Earth on you and your success.”

JO. Oh, I've got one. Always hearing the joke “You might be the first person on the planet to ever do that!”

LIAM. Coming up with our own, I like it. Um — Developing an unhealthy obsession with Earth nature documentaries.

JO. Having to watch a stupid Mars history presentation every year of your childhood.

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ARIS. (*Teasing.*) Having to sleep through a stupid Mars history presentation every year of your childhood, you mean.

LIAM. Naming everything Red — Red Planet Post, the Red Underground —

JO. (*Re: the beer they're drinking.*) Red Planet Ale.

LIAM. Good one. What did people do here before Red Planet Ale?

ARIS. Developed a complex about living on Mars being just as good as living on Earth.

JO. “You’ll love life on Mars.”

LIAM. “Mars: a whole new world.”

ARIS. “The colony’s compounds contain all the amenities you could hope for.”

JO. “A state of the art performing arts center, a beautiful central shopping and dining district, and much, much more.”

LIAM. Okay, let’s stop before anyone says it.

ARIS. What? “The frontier is a place of endless possibilities?”

JO. Endless possibilities, sure. If “endless possibilities” includes having to take a dump but spending fifteen minutes to get your suit off first.

ARIS. (*Laughing.*) Jo.

LIAM. I can’t top that.

ARIS. I wish that was in the presentation for real.

JO. It would make it a hundred times better.

MARVIN. However, the settlers soon learned that the newest residents of Mars wouldn’t be coming from Earth.

ALL. “Andrew, I have something to tell you.”

LIAM. (*As Andrew.*) “What is it, Ella?”

ARIS. (*As Ella.*) “I’m pregnant.”

JO. Ohhhh, shit!

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MARVIN. And with that, life on Mars would never be the same. There was a baby on the way. The first of a select few — the first generation of Martians.

JO. Did you notice that? “A select few.” It doesn’t say how many.

ARIS. So, what? You’re saying the ghost story is true?

LIAM. That doesn’t mean anything.

JO. It means there’s a question mark. (*Aris makes a loud thumping sound, out of sight of Liam.*)

LIAM. Okay, what is that?

JO. It’s spooooky.

ARIS. Liam, it’s an old building.

LIAM. But it sounded like —

JO. You need another drink.

LIAM. I’m not finished with this one.

JO. Come on, Liam, one of these days you have to loosen up — (*Jo goes to their bag for another drink, and Aris makes the thumping sound again, scaring Liam more.*)

LIAM. Seriously, what is that? (*The lights flicker out.*) It’s not just pipes.

ARIS. I’m not saying it’s pipes. I don’t know what it could be.

LIAM. You’re not scared.

ARIS. I’m not — not scared. But it’s in a good way. I’m spooked.

LIAM. Oh, great. Spooked.

JO. It’s nothing, Liam.

LIAM. Then why are the lights still off? (*A loud sound from another part of the compound. Jo and Aris didn’t make it.*) Okay. Okay. I know what’s going on. You’re messing with me again. (“*Don’t You (Forget About Me)*” by Simple Minds plays through MARVIN.) But how do you get this song to keep playing??

JO. Maybe this is the song it wants to play when it’s about to kill us.

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LIAM. Are you happy? You got me. You scared me.

JO. You should see the look on your face, it's pretty great.

ARIS. (*Getting into the song.*) This is kind of catchy. I like it.

JO. Yeah, come on Liam, let's dance!

LIAM. Absolutely not. (*Aris and Jo dance around a bit, maybe sing. The loud sound happens again. The song stutters out, and the lights flicker back on.*)

ARIS. Okay, yeah, that is a *little* concerning.

LIAM. Wait, are you not doing that?

ARIS. Not that one.

JO. It's a good thing they're shutting this MARVIN down. It's clearly way past its time.

ARIS. MARVIN? What's going on?

LIAM. (*Freaking out a bit.*) It's not going to say. Why would it say?

JO. I shouldn't have told you that ghost story.

LIAM. So, are we leaving now?

ARIS. I think you're maybe overreacting a bit. We knew this place would be a little creepy.

JO. That's the whole fun of it. If you were scared, you didn't have to come.

LIAM. It's the last night before our Test. I wanted to hang out.

JO. We're hanging out!

LIAM. I just don't like what's going on. That's all.

JO. You can leave if you want. You don't have to stay.

ARIS. But we'd like it if you did stay. You're the one who knows the presentation best. How would we get through the whole thing without you basically narrating it?

JO. Yeah, like, if this was the Test, you'd have the best score out of all of us.

LIAM. I'm glad my dorkiness is useful to you.

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JO. Don't worry, Liam, I'll fight a ghost before it can kill you. Promise.

LIAM. Ha. Okay. Thank you, I appreciate it.

ARIS. You're okay?

LIAM. Yeah, I'm okay. I'm okay.

JO. So. What comes next?

LIAM. The kids, of course.

MARVIN. Life on Mars would never be the same again.

LIAM. — Right. "Andrew, I have something to tell you."

ARIS. *(As Andrew.)* "Uh, what is it, Ella?"

LIAM. Ha. Yeah, that's what one of the founders of Mars sounded like.

JO. *(As Andrew.)* I bet that's exactly what he sounded like. "Ella, could you hold on like one second?"

ARIS. *(As Andrew.)* "Ella, could you give me some peace and quiet for once in your life?"

LIAM. *(As Ella.)* "Andrew."

JO. *(As Andrew.)* "Ella. What is your issue right now? I'm trying to do very important Mars-related work and all you want to do is talk to me?"

LIAM. *(As Ella.)* "Andrew."

ARIS. *(As Andrew.)* "Ella. How many times do I have to tell you I don't like talking to you?"

LIAM. *(As Ella.)* "Andrew! Listen to me! I'm pregnant." *(They're all laughing at this point.)*

JO. *(As Andrew.)* "Ella, what are we going to do? I don't know how to be a dad."

ARIS. *(As Andrew.)* "Ella, we're on Mars. How are we supposed to have a kid on Mars?"

MARVIN. It was the first of a special generation — the first people to ever be born on Mars. Now the settlers would have to adapt to a whole new challenge.

OUTPOST

ARIS. (*As Andrew.*) “Ella, it’s like we’re adapting to a whole new challenge.”

LIAM. (*As Ella.*) “Andrew, I swear to god.”

JO. (*As Andrew.*) “What? What’d I do?”

MARVIN. New protocols were put in place, a schooling system was developed, food, water, and waste level projections adjusted, development milestones charted, as Mars prepared for the next generation.

ARIS. Okay, I can see why you’d fall asleep.

JO. I don’t know if I’d be able to do it.

ARIS. Fall asleep? Sure you can.

JO. Raising a kid like that. Without that safety net of a society, of other people. There were, what, eight people here? And then to have kids on the way? I wouldn’t be able to do it. It’s too much.

LIAM. Didn’t your mom —?

JO. (*Sharp.*) What? Have me when she was young? Yeah. And I wouldn’t be able to do that either. “Youngest pregnancy in Mars history,” which — I don’t know. But by then, at least there was civilization here. To help.

ARIS. And now here you are!

JO. And now here I am. She had me a week before her Test.

LIAM. Really? I didn’t know that.

JO. Yep.

LIAM. Bet that’s not on the Test.

JO. Ha. Probably not.

ARIS. Maybe, though. I’ve heard that anything can be on it. Like they can simulate a malfunction on the surface, and you have to go fix it.

LIAM. My parents said it’s almost like a personality test. To see what best suits you. That it changes based on the person.

JO. So Liam’s Test will be meeting a ghost.

OUTPOST

LIAM. How would that be helpful?

JO. Facing your fears!

ARIS. Liam, you could be in your Test *right now*. Jo and I might just be simulations.

JO. Yeah, we're simulations, but the ghosts are very real!

LIAM. If you were simulations, you wouldn't tell me you were simulations.

JO. Anything is possible! — I wonder if anyone's died during their Test?

LIAM. That wouldn't happen.

ARIS. You could die from stress.

LIAM. (*A little panicked now.*) Why would you say that?

JO. Ugh, it's so dumb. Why does everyone make such a big deal of it? Why do we even have to take it?

LIAM. — To make sure we can survive.

JO. Yeah, it's for survival on Mars. Technical stuff. But it's not like it's going to cover everything we'll encounter in our lives. It can't.

ARIS. We should boycott.

LIAM. To accomplish what?

ARIS. To make a statement. To say it doesn't prepare us for life.

LIAM. It still has its purpose, though. It's still useful for the things it's testing us on. Unlike this presentation, which doesn't serve its purpose anymore because this MARVIN is malfunctioning.

JO. What's the point, anyway? We could boycott it, but it's not like we'd make a difference. The Test isn't going anywhere. It's a tradition. It's been here since the first generation.

ARIS. You both lack conviction.

JO. And could you imagine if *you* didn't take the Test, Aris? People would lose their minds. The granddaughter of the First Generation?

ARIS. It's not that big a deal.

OUTPOST

JO. Okay. You tell yourself that.

ARIS. It's not.

LIAM. So, you two aren't simulations, right?

JO. I guess you'll never know for sure.

MARVIN. As the children grew up, they became interested in the culture of Earth. They watched films during their education. And for fun, they played a game — (*Aris, Liam, and Jo join in.*) Imagining what life might have been like on Earth.

LIAM. Oh, this is the best part. (*MARVIN reveals a small collection of props and costume pieces: maybe western hats, an 80s style prom dress, a few wigs, prop guns. Definitely two swords. Liam, Jo, and Aris explore everything. Aris tries on a hat. Jo picks up a sword.*)

JO. I thought there were usually three of these.

ARIS. Maybe someone got here before us.

LIAM. How does it feel to hold? Do you feel like a badass?

JO. — I think so. Yeah. You want to fight? (*Liam picks up the other sword.*)

LIAM. How'd you know I've wanted to try this my whole life?

JO. That's — kind of sad.

LIAM. I know.

JO. As long as you know.

LIAM. (*Launches into playing a character.*) Mordred. My old nemesis.

ARIS. Oh wow, you had that ready to go.

JO. So — what am I supposed to say?

LIAM. You're Mordred. You're my nemesis.

JO. Who's Mordred?

LIAM. Knight of the Round Table. Traitor to King Arthur.

ARIS. Oh, right, of course, *that* Mordred.

LIAM. So. Mordred. Here we meet, on the fields of Camlann.

JO. Yes. We do. — I'm like half following this right now.

OUTPOST

ARIS. Want me to jump in?

JO. No! I want to fight.

LIAM. The battle has been fought. Many valiant men have died. Let us come to peace.

JO. Never.

LIAM. You will not best me, Mordred.

JO. Then I will die trying. *(Jo charges Liam. They play-fight. They're not very good. They've never fought with swords before.)*

ARIS. You're terrible at that. Here. *(Aris takes the sword from Liam.)*
Let me show you how it's done.

LIAM. Come on, I want to do the death scene! *(Aris goes after Jo. They play-fight. Aris is clearly better at it.)*

ARIS. You will not bring this kingdom to ruin, Mordred! You have stolen the crown and desecrated it!

JO. Yeah? Well, I think you're a bad person!

ARIS. I'm King Arthur — I'm a good person!

JO. How do you know?

ARIS. Um, because everyone says so.

LIAM. And because you have the sword Excalibur.

ARIS. And because I have the sword Excalibur.

JO. What sword do I have?

LIAM. — I don't know.

JO. Fine! My sword is the fucking Martian Annihilator, so yeah! Get ready to be annihilated!

ARIS. Oh, damn, okay. *(Jo charges Aris again. They fight.)*

JO. You'll never win, Arthur. The crown is mine.

ARIS. You have betrayed me, your fellow knights, and your country. But most of all, you've betrayed yourself.

JO. Oh, boo hoo.

ARIS. It's very serious! *(Jo has Aris backed into a corner.)*

OUTPOST

JO. What is? That I have you beat? (*Aris disarms Jo.*)

ARIS. Don't be so sure of yourself.

JO. Okay, Aris, where'd that come from?

ARIS. My grandma used to do this. She probably even used one of these. We would play together.

JO. I remember that! There was the time I came over, and she had to keep showing me how to hold it.

ARIS. Yes! "It's an extension of your arm, Jo."

JO. "Please stop trying to twirl it."

ARIS. (*Laughing.*) That was a good day.

LIAM. (*Slightly hurt.*) Yeah, sounds like it.

ARIS. Liam, want to do the honors here, and kill Mordred?

LIAM. Oh! Sure, thank you.

ARIS. Excalibur. (*Aris hands Liam the sword. Meanwhile, Jo sneaks to pick theirs back up. Liam "stabs" Jo.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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