

Life on Mars

By Mohammad Khan

A luscious Martian landscape filed with lakes and and strange plants and animals. Two bipedal martians, Garrod and Ruby walk towards a glass building, the ConnectDome on Tharsis Rise or Syna depending which Ministry you come from.

Martians came in a variety of forms. Some have small bush of hair on the top of their head and others have long strands the come down to their waist from the top of their head.

Garrod has a small splash of black hair on his head and always ready for work.
Ruby has a vibrant red hair ponytail and black-rimmed glasses.

"Did Oracle give you the recent data she pulled from Curiosity satellite", Garrod asks Ruby.

"I haven't gotten a chance to look at it. Told me to look specifically at the Kupier Belt."

They enter the glass building using facial recognition tech. Thousands of similar scientists work in this building.

"Kuiper Belt?", said Garrod. "Why look into it now?"

"I don't know. She's not here now. She's at Olympus Mons doing volcanic analysis."

The two of them enter their lab to look at the results Oracle sent. Ruby pulls up the Oracle's data while Garrod looks at his own climate data.

"Whoa", says Ruby. "Are these predictions correct?"

Garrod looks over Ruby's shoulders. "Wait global temperatures have risen 4 degrees?"

"Not only that, there was another email from Oracle about 5 large asteroids coming from Kuiper Belt."

"Again?! How long do we have?", asked Garrod.

"It's tough to say how long because they've just left the belt and are on a collision course with us.", replies Ruby. "They're large enough to wipe more than half the life and critically damage the ecosystem for millennia. The model predicts impact within 2 years."

"Ok. We can bring up the planetary defense initiative from the 1920s to the Orwell Ministry."

Ruby picks up a phone and dials a number "Where's the council meeting right now?"

"They're by the Argyre Basin, Ruby", replies the secretary on the phone.

She hangs up and they both hurry towards the ministry.

The Orwell ministry of well dressed martians are responsible for the political decisions of the Northern hemisphere of Mars. A group of 7 martians who make up the council stand taking by a water basin. Beautiful flora and fauna surround the a glistening water basin.

Ruby and Garrod rush to meet the group of martians.

"Ruby", says council member John surprised. "You have conclusive data from your andromeda galaxy experiment?"

Ruby and Garrod stand in front of John as they deliver the horrible news.

"No John. We have grave news", speaks Ruby. "There are asteroids headed for Mars that will eliminate all Martian life."

"Look I can't bring that up again. I'm running for reelection in a few weeks. It took years for them to trust

me. I'll be the Martian who cried Yorker."

"John!" Garrod shouts angrily. "Re-elections won't matter if these asteroids hit Mars. We need PDP. The planetary defense protocol."

"Garrod, we haven't activated PDP for 80 years. And even then, those asteroids burned up in our atmosphere. You made us lose 10 billion in resources. Set us back when we suffered a depression and needed the money. Why listen now?"

"Because Martian life will die. We will all die without a trace."

Councilmen John scoffs. "Tell me. How long will it take for the asteroids to arrive?"

"2 years", says Ruby quietly.

"Right, tell me when its something pressing." John pats them both on the shoulder. "good seeing you both." He walks away.

2 days later.

Ruby and Garrod are in their lab working on solutions to get around

"The other council members won't go behind John's back because they're afraid of being caught", says Ruby hanging up a phone.

"We can't go around John? What if we overruled his decision", said Garrod.

"We can't initiate the protocol with governor John's approval", replies Ruby frustrated. "The system will only act on majority council approval."

"Are the asteroids still on track?"

"The satellites still says less than 2 years."

"Well I don't blame them", says Garrod softly.

"What." Ruby turns to face Garrod unsure if she understood what he said.

"We cried danger before. And we were wrong. Why should they believe us now? Even now when the threats 2 years away? While there are more pressing problems that can hurt us right now."

"What are you saying."

"I'm saying we need to make this a problem now, not in 2 years."

"how do you suggest that?"

"We play their game."

2 weeks later.

Martian studio where two martians are having a discussion in front of the studio audience. All being streamed instantaneously to martians worldwide.

Garrod is talking with a news reporter, Steven Gallenburg on the incoming asteroids. Garrod is engaged in a debate between him and Janet, an acclaimed anti-science enthusiast.

"So you're saying asteroids are coming to Mars", says Steven.

"Yes". Garrod courteously replies. "And they'll crash into Mars."

"Right crash into Mars", Janet says snidely. "And what happens to Martian society?"

"We likely won't survive."

The audience is deadly silent.

Garrod notices it. "But we can survive if the asteroids are deflected by other asteroids or if we deflect it ourselves like last time."

"Speaking of last time", Janet pounces on the opportunity, "We protected ourselves before from the asteroids that you proclaimed would destroy all Martian life."

"Right, but--"

"And those asteroids were tiny rocks." Janet continues. "No bigger than a pebble on my driveway. We spent a billion dollars on that. Why should we do it again and waste our money?"

"On the off chance you're wrong. If you're wrong and it's not pebble sized, then all Martian life is dead." Garrod sits back proud of his answer. "Furthermore, we scientists don't have much funding. If the regions put a fraction of the money from military spending into research and development, we might not even have this problem."

Janet doesn't respond.

Steven notices the silence and breaks it. "And what can we do about it?"

"Talk to your politicians. Your local leaders. Urge them to put forward more money towards scientific research", Garrod

Janet smiles at Garrod's banal proposition knowing full well that will not happen.

"Yes. Talk with your politicians and ask them how often listening to scientists has gotten anything done."

"That's all the time we have for today's debate", Steven interrupts. Thank you Garrod and Janet for stopping by. We'll be back with the weather after these messages."

Garrod exits the building. He sees Ruby waiting for him on the sidewalk. It's nighttime in the city that never sleeps. The Lorzenze City, located in Arabia Terra region.

"What do you think", asks Garrod.

"It could've been worse. I think that might've gone better than the other ones."

"Yeah, at this point they're having me on the show to boost ratings. I'm basically a laughing stock for the general public. Someone they can point to and say 'see he got it' or 'wow that guy's an idiot'."

Garrod and Ruby walk down the sidewalk passing the vibrant buildings and lively nightlife. Walking against the flow of the crowd, a few martians recognize Garrod and snicker and make snide comments under their breath.

"How are things at the lab", continues Garrod.

"Satellites say Asteroids are staying on the same collision path. Same timeline. 2 years."

"Oracle's launching probes to analyze the composition of moons to see if plant life could grow there." Ruby tries to sound cherry, but nothing can defeat the incoming calamity.

"Is there nothing we can do?" Garrod. Garrod looks up at the blank night sky.

2 months later.

In the lab, Garrod and Ruby work with heavy shoulders on their cosmic and terrestrial research.

"Anything from John", Garrod asks Ruby.

"No. He's been ghosting me."

"You'd think he'd be willing to at least hear us out. At least you."

"Nope."

Ruby blindly taps on the keyboard in front of her. Each tap filled with fruitless endeavors. Years of scientific research being demolished by an imminent threat no one believes is coming.

"I was looking forward to my particle experiment", says Garrod. "So close to proving if time has a physical dimension."

Her head falls in despair and lays on her desk.

"At least we still have time. How long does it take to start the protocol?", says Garrod.

"A little under 2 years isn't a lot of time to initialize the protocol. It'll take a few months to get the necessary equipment and to deploy the countermeasures. We also need money to even start the dang thing."

"So even if we did deploy the initiative within the next 3 months, we would cut it close."

The lab is silent. Martian life continues outside the glass window oblivious of the oblivion coming. A small mantis fly was buzzing around in the room. It kept bumping into the glass trying to get out.

Ruby stares at the fly. Garrod walks over to the window and opens it.

The mantis fly buzzes around missing the window in multiple flybys. It lands a small notebook.

Ruby observes Garrod's actions.

Garrod gently picks up the notebook and guides the notebook outside the window. Once the mantis fly is outside, it files off into the world.

"That's it!", Ruby shouts.

2 years later

On a studio floor, Steven is sitting at his desk under the illuminating fluorescent light.

"Garrod Stimples, a physicist with the national planetary society has been a muse urging the public to heed his warning of asteroids coming to destroy Mars. Here now, Garrod Stimples. Thank you for being here."

Garrod sits firmly in his chair. "Thank you for having me."

"Now, Garrod. You wrote a paper on the asteroid prevent program."

"Yes. The findings indicate large meteors- about Lilly field sized- would be enough to destroy the planet."

"So what's the prognosis? Just so we know what were talking about? 1,000 years- 2,000?", Steven replies.

"Everyone alive today will die due to a catastrophic planetary destruction."

"Can you elaborate on that?"

"The last time there were asteroids this large impacting our planet. The solar system was just forming."

"What can we do to reverse this?"

"There's a lot we can do. Even 2 years ago, or last year. But now.." Garrod shrugs casually accepting fate.
"Nothing."

"What about the Planetary Defense Protocol?"

"The protocol wouldn't work. Too slow to be activated."

"What if we did activate it?"

"Even If we piled all our resources together and focused on this, I still don't see how we'd survive."

"People are going on their weekends, is there any uplifting note we can leave them on. Is there a way we can survive the impacts?"

"Not really no. Even if we do survive, it would be a near uninhabitable Martian environment."

"Ok. Garrod Stimples, scientist with the National Planetary Society. We'll be back after this....hopefully."

Garrod leaves the studio and meets up with Ruby.

"That could've gone better", says Ruby.

"It doesn't matter anymore", says Garrod. "How's Project Persephone?"

"Almost done. Oracle's launching system is almost done. The pods are ready."

They arrive at their lab.

"Where are we sending it too", asks Garrod. "None of the planets in the solar system are currently habitable."

"This one is." Rubys shows an image of a fiery wasteland planet with a small moon orbiting it.

"It's on fire? Life can't survive there. The seed pods will burn up."

"No but it will eventually. We're sending unicellular life, not multicellular like us. We might not be able to survive, but they might. Projections show that it has the potential to sustain life."

The two of them look the young fiery planet. Their new home. One they will never visit. The asteroids will arrive in a few days. The skies are already darkening from their sheer size.

"Then maybe they won't make the same mistakes as us", speaks Ruby softly.

"What's the name of the planet", asks Garrod.

"Earth."

THE END