It was sixty years since the initial colonization of Mars, and frankly, it was starting to show. The smaller habs and the more original buildings were covered with a persistent coating of powdered red rock and had a general wornness to them.

This wornness was also displayed on the people within the habs. The exuberant utopian hope of the initial settlers had turned with time into the wise cynic of the old hand. There was cussing and spitting when doors broke or the air scrubbers malfunctioned, as they now often did.

They all swore it had been better in the beginning, but deep down they knew it was probably just the same.

The initial rush of mining had subsided once the rarer of elements were extracted and now it was the more mundane, yet common minerals which saw their day. But the work was unexciting and they pay was lousy. Yet these were the people who had agreed to such jobs. For one reason or another, they had come, or stayed, and now it was what it was.

The bar was an old hangout. At one point a group of revolutionaries had set up some sort of operation in the small hab they had built into the side of the cliff, but whatever fate had befallen them, they left, and a bar seemed to suit the old run down place well.

For a time in the past, it would have been considered large; nearly fifty feet by fifty feet, almost luxurious for those used to the austere and crampt survivalist space of the early settlements.

Overhead there was a dull bubble of reinforced glass, studded with micrometer impacts, cracks from improper decompression, Martian red sand, and just general grime.

From the ceiling and walls hung pieces of equipment: old suits, shovels, vac systems, solar panels. Perhaps when the revolutionaries were here, the stuff had been used, but by now it had become decoration, not unlike the instruments or old street signs would be on earth. And if you moved any one of the pieces, you would first need to disturb the years old layer of grime which had covered the items completely. Underneith you would find the vague outline of the item in dust on the wall. Red of course.

It was a great bar.

I looked around the place, eyes jumping over Petrov, the old out of shape bar tender and towards the locals.

There was Bernice, who had once managed a small mine nearby during the boom, and what she had lost in standing and finances, she had gained in alcohol tollerance.

She currently argued with Bryce who we all suspected was, or used to be some sort of smuggler. He lived in a disconnected hab on the other side of the hill and word was he had his own small ship, if it could be believed.

He currently was trying to explain something to Bernice, but as soon as I leaned forward it was all too clear they were talking politics again.

Next, sitting at the bar was Xavier. He could have been the best of us, and was apparently the son or cousin to some big politican back on earth, or had been anyway. Something went south and the whole family had to bolt. Now he cradled a tall pint and stared up at the screen, which was showing a no-holds-barred martial arts showdown cast all the way out from the Mara. Every hit that connected caused his lean face to breifly tighten into a thin sadistic smile.

Next to him were the Black Vac Boys. Those two had thought themselves real gangsters, but at some point had gotten addicted to some very expensive synthetics which had blown through whatever money they had been able to extort in their short criminal careers.

Finally there was Martha. If Xavier could have been the best, Martha could have been the saddest. She hadn't been an executive or politician or outlaw, but instead a simple colonist, just one of the early ones. She had been able to see and experience first hand the slow but inexorable slip into decy that Mars had had so quickly fallen into.

Her partner had taken the children and gone back earthside, leaving her with the hab. She never had really recovered from that rejection of her hope and the dream which had propelled her into space. She could be commonly be found crying quietly into her drink on long nights.

For sure, they are were a good bunch of people despite their shortcomings and they all looked after each other, even after me, the least social of the bunch.

I tried my best to stay on everyone's good side, and had more than once done favors for the others. We, despite all the shit Mars had turned into, had found a community, a fellowship of man, here together among Petrov's glasses; a real connection that the first utopians would have understood.

That why I was against letting the god stay with us that year.

The god had simply walked in through the airlock, no indication of a vehicle or a suit of any kind, let alone a ship. She wore a faded blue outfit of some sort, but it had seen so much dirt and wear, it was hard to tell whether it was the service jacket of the blue collar worker or the uniform of the soldier. She had looked blankly up at us as we had stared at her in curiosity.

As we did so, I was surprised no one had commented on the fact that she was… well… a god. It was really not hard to notice. Despite her disheveled nature, her features were supernaturally defined, the definition of handsome, and she had a glow to her, an actual physical luminescent glow that made it clear what she was.

But no one had said anything about it, so I hadn't made a scene. What did it matter anyway?

The god ignored the curious looks from the lcoals, and the disgusting yet stereotypical stairs of the Black Vac Boys. She had made her way up to the counter and asked Petrov for a drink.

Perhaps Petrov knew something, or perhaps he too had taken a shine to the goddess in front of him, because he didn't ask to see any payment, the usual challenge against outsiders.

“What'll you have?” he asked, a hint of something in his voice that just might have been emotion under his usual eastern bloc stoicism.

“Something strong.” She grunted, and fell into one of the surprisingly comfortable bar stools.

Julio, the older of the Black Vacs, leaned over and made a pass as the god.

“Hey babe, when did you fall from heaven?” It was pathetic at best. I was honestly surprised she didn't obliterate him into a smouldering pile of offal right then and there.

Yet as the god stared at him, it was clear she was actually regarding him or what he just said for some reason. She stared as if she couldn't quite understand what she was seeing. Then, after a moment of silence she went to speak. I watched on nervously.

“Fuck off” she said, laying one dirty gloved hand on Julio's face and pushed.

She must have been trying not to hurt him, since he merely rocked back in his own seat, a grin on his face, rather than smashing through the wall.

He whistled but left her, to talk, in no quiet words about the lude things he wanted to do to her, with his younger compatriot, Udaygo.

I watched on for a long while, feigning at observing the bloodsport on the screen behind her.

She stayed late that night, and again the next day.

On the following day, someone must have remembered that the bar existed, since one of the Black Vac Boy's former lackeys came in to extort the monthly protection fee from Petrov.

Petrov scowled as the olive drab suited man walked in.

The fasimile soldeir was far too well manicured for this sort of area, sporting a fashionable haricut and a spotless helmet. Petrov cursed under his breath and put down the glass he had been cleaning.

“Thought we had forgotten about you, you crazy Russian bastard?” He laughed, nonchalantly showing Petrov his shiny firearm. We weren't going to get out of this collection easily.

I decided that it had gotten a bit too hot in the room and went to leave, but the hired gun aimed his piece at me and gestured me back to the seat.

“No go Amigo. We had some trouble at some of our other colelctions. No one leaves till I get the money.” He warned.

I looked at the weapon and decided that it wouldn't hurt to get one or two more drinks after all, and slunk back to my corner.

I looked up to see the goddess staring at both of us. I shrugged. “Bad time to come around I suppose.” I said unhelpfully, and returned to my seat.

The punk had noticed the goddess now though, and no doubt wanted to push his luck, despite the obvious, insanely deadly risks. Some people…

“Ai! Who is this beautiful lady? Petrov, where the hell have you been keeping her?” he made eyes at her, to her visible disgust.

“Take the money and fuck off.” Petrov said, returning from the back room with a small box. He slid the box onto the bar for the punk to pick up. However, the punk now seemed to have other, more suicidial ideas.

A hand went towards the god's waist. The other lazily holding the weapon, in no general direction, yet present all the same; an implication.

“Hey, I've got some time, might as well enjoy myself” he said to Petrov.

The god smacked his hand out of the way, without looking, with a dull thwack, but said nothing.

“Don't fucking harrass my customers you piece of shit.” Petrov cursed, suddenly more serious than I had seen him in the past.

He fumbled with his hands and I vagually remembered the he kept a piece of his own behind the counter, an anti-armor shotgun of some kind which could blast straight through the armor of most suits and even the hulls of small ships. I had seen him use it once, on the lowest setting. I had no desire to be anywhere near if things got out of hand.

The creep closed with the god and leered down at her.

After a moment of obvious subdued anger, she set down her drink and looked at the man.

“Can I help you with something?”

To my surprise, the tone was more tired than angry.

It was then which I first suspected that the punk, heck, all of the other bar goers, couldn't understandwhat the woman was, and how dangerous she was.

I stared at that greasy blond hair, which, to my mind, radiated a shining unstoppable aura and supreme power.

“Can I buy you a drink?” He asked, sitting in the spare seat to the side of the god.

Petrov glared at him and edged the box closer in an effort to get him to leave. The punk merely waved it off.

“They're not expecting me for some time. And to be honest, I just wanted to talk to someone.” He said, resting his hands on the counter, yet staring at the god. His tone was less braggadocio. Perhaps he wasn't a total punk, but you would have had to dig deep to find that 1%.

I looked at the punk, and with the last response, realized that he was perhaps truly smitten by the woman, in spite or perhaps because of her rustic appearance.

“I'm sory. I don't want to talk; to you or anyone else.” She said, still staring at her drink, which no one, including Petrov had noticed stayed perpetually full regardless of how many swigs she took from it.

“Well, I do want to, if I could trouble you for just a moment. You seem like a nice looking woman. Might even be an eye catcher if you would clean up a bit. You want to head back to my place? I've got a ten person hab all to myself. It even has a swimming pool. All the food I could ever want, even stuff you can only get earthside. Far as I can see, its only missing you.” He grinned.

The god took a disinterest sip. It became clear he was actually going to wait for a reply. The silence was approaching awkward levels, and he looked a bit unnerved. Whatever response he had expected, it wasn't this.

She let out an exasperated sigh and finally looked at him square in the eyes. “What do you really want? Tell me the truth.” Something shot its way from her eyes to his.

He started sweating.

“Come on. You were going to say something. What was it?”

He coughed, looking more nervous by the second. There was something wrong with this woman. He was starting to understand.

His mouth seemed to open on its own. It described how he wanted to engage in carnal relations with the goddess.

He let out a yelp, eyes wide at what he had just said so brazenly. Sure, he was going to have gotten to that, but he needed to lay on the sleeze first! What had made him come on so strong? He must have wondered.

I choked on my own drink and half hid behind my table waiting for the horrifying reaction. However, the god didn't respond violently. Not yet.

She let another sigh escape her and in a fluid motion got off her chair and pulled the man in close.

For a moment, the poor bastard thought she was going to kiss him and made the appropriate facial gesture. She stared at him, face right up close until he got the message. He opened his eyes in surprise, the gears turning furiously, trying to understand what was happening here.

“Carlos.” She stated flatly, if a bit sadly. “You're not a bad man. I know that. What do you fucking want here? What is your goal? What's your endgame past all the money, drugs, food and women? You should just take the money and leave.”

Her voice to me was surprisingly deep and not quite as gruff as perhaps she at first had let on. Had he ever given us his name?

The man recalculated, the hamster having found its wheel once more. I could see the arithmatic on his face. This was not one of the usual tavern wenches. This was someone with some schooling, or smarts at least. He changed his tactics.

“I'm going up in the world. This assignment is the lowest I've been given in the last month. Its just as I deserve. Don't you know power goes to those worthy of it? I plan on going right to the fucking top. And I can take you there as well if you come with me.”

“Ha!” Interjected a voice off to the side.

“We've been there muchacho. You're just going to end up licking Lopez's boots, the fucking ungrateful bastard.” Julio said, spitting to the ground.

But Carlos, the punk, merely waved away the insult. “Lopez is an unimaginative man. Give me a couple of months behind the wheel. I'll be swimming in money, all the power and wealth you can imagine.” He slipped a reassuring grin at the god.

“Its the motivation. The strength of will. The strong eat the weak in this Martian world. Come on with me and be part of the winning team. The people here are losers.”

He looked to the god for some sort of response and perhaps it was that look for reassurance which betrayed that he didn't feel quite as confident as he portrayed, or as set in his confidence as he would have hoped.

“You're just like them.” The god said silently under her breath. I wasn't even sure Carlos caught it.

She lifted herself to her actual height, the dull light shining heavenly behind her and a breeze wafted through the bar as the other inhabitants stared on in half curiousness, half horror.

“Woman, take care, he's armed.” Julio warned, with actual concern.

The poor fools were concerned about *her.*

“You really believe in that? Are you willing to do whatever you can to reach the top? Stamp on the weak to crawl towards the light?” She asked, placing a hand on his shoulder. She had never taken her eyes away from him. The stare was otherworldly. I could not tear my eyes away from her either.

He looked at her, trying to comprehend the screaming sense of danger his body was feeling, and how she was now somehow taller, and more defined than himself. Everything was wrong. She had flipped how all this should be going. She was the one who should be lower than he, and unassured, and impressed. It was wrong and bad, and something she had done or said, or implied disturbed him to the core.

He struggled to regain some of his perceived lost masculinity, and doubled down on his previous answer, although sounding less convincing now. He shook slightly, sweat beading on his forehead.

With visible effort, he put his hand on his waist and sleezed out a trembling smile as he desperately tried to turn the situation back into something he understood.

“Yes I do.” He said, feigning bravery.

She stared at him blankly, the allowed herself a sad smile.

Then Carlos exploded.

“Fucking hell!” Julio yelled, jumping back in his seat.

“Oh god!” Petrov coughed, turning back as the dead man's body fell backwards to the floor.

Bernice grinned something evil, probably having dreampt of doing just that to several people in her past.

Bryce's hand went to his mouth in surprise and looked impressed. Xavier stared in horror.

Even Martha looked up finally from her drink as his body came down with a wet splat.

I was just glad she hadn't taken the rest of us with him.

“Damn!” Bryce shouted excitedly, jumping to his feet. “That was damn good work! I could have sworn you didn't even have a weapon until that last second. You were hells fast! … just warn us next time!” He said with a laugh, going to clap her on the back, then, thinking better of it, clapped his hands together instead. He had not seen where the weapon had come from or returned to.

So they really didn't realize how dangerous she was? What she had just done? I took a look at the reactions and rose to tell them what had really gone on.

“Hey, you there.” She said looking at me.

I froze in terror and looked at her with wide eyes. How had she known?!

“Can you, err… give me a hind with this?” She asked, sheepishly, pointing vagually down at what had used to hanve been Carlos.

“Oh- ahh, sure” I stammered. Our eyes met for a brief second and that same something connected with me, warning me that I better keep my fucking mouth shut.

Left with no other choice, I grabbed Carlos's legs and helped the god carry the body to the airlock.

And from then on, the god was one of us.

The god had never given us their name, but allowed us to call her Mia, which I assumed was some sort of nickname. She really didn't look like a Mia. Perhaps a Gabriel, or a Delilah…

I learned that Mia had been in some sort of military unit if we were to believe her own story. She had seen most of the solar system but also numerous other ones.

She also straight up told everyone that she was a god.

They didn't believe her.

Now every other day or so, she would roll into Petrov's and complain along with the rest of us.

It seemed her experiences as a god hadn't been what she had been expecting.

“You know, I used to burn through nebulas...” She said whistfully, gunning back a shot of something nasty.

Petrov looked up and nodded non-commitally. Julio beamed at her. For whatever, reason the previous incident had only solidified his crush for the woman.

“Oh really?” He asked, with a tone that implied he didn't believe her in the slightest, but was absolutely up for hearing about it.

“Whole nebulas?” He asked.

Mia looked at him, a slow dumb grin running across her face. She was an absurd number of drinks in.

“Whole nebulas.” She confirmed, putting down her glass a bit too hard. It went to shatter, then decided not to. No one noticed.

“When enemy sshlips tried to hide, they'd have me burn off the whole thing. Not too environmental if you ask me.” She got a bit misty eyed.

“Hrm. How come they didn't just have you destroy all the ships?” Bryce, ever the subtle one, asked.

“Diplomashy” She said slurred, raising her glass, which was suspiciously full again, as if in a toast.

“Let em know they're helplesh, let em know they have no chance. Then they just surrender and boom!” She clapped her hands together, the mug hovering innocently in the air above her where it had been left.

“...You've got all their ships!” She seemed pleased with her explanation. “Or at least that’s what they told me...” She added,

“Huh” Bryce said, clearly not impressed. He looked back at the bloodsport. Mia looked at the back of his head with the same silly smile.

“I've flown shtraight through ships; watched them break apart, cracking along the spine...” She said, illustrating with her hands. She looked at her hand and her mind shot light years away, sobering before my eyes. And then her mood changed instantly to sadness.

“The noises as they decompress is horrifying…” She said to herself. “The sight of the bodies is worse…”

She looked around timidly to see whether anyone had heard her somber remarks. No one was really listening. A tiny restrained smile rallied on her face.

“So what are you doing now?” Julio asked Mia, breaking the silence.

Mia reached up and grabbed the mug out of the air and passed it to Petrov, ordering another drink. She shrugged.

“Kinda keeping a low profile. Doing odd jobs if you get me.” She admitted.

“For a god?” I asked, ruining my normal silence. “Seems like you could do a bit better, pardon me saying.”

Julio glared at me, either for wat I had said or because I had taken her attention off of him. Mia shrugged again.

“One day it was. One day it was just gone. The whole thing. Godhood, confidense, reason to live… the whole nine parsecs, haha. Now I'm just drifting.”

Like those bodies? I wondered…

But there was something interesting. Lost her godhood? How was that possible? And if true, why was I so sure she was still one? Not to mention what she had done to poor Carlos.

We had buried Carlos a bit away in the wilderness.

“No longer a god, but you're a real angel in my opinion.” Julios said.

Mia blushed and looked back at her drink. Then the conversation turned to other things.

A couple of months later, Mia entered the bar again. Despite doing nothing of note after Carlos, I hadn't lost my firm belief she was a god, even if the others didn't believe her.

She waved to Petrov. He grunted back. She was one of the regulars now.

She nodded to me. I nodded back, then pulled my cloak around me tighter as the air systems suddenly churned on real cold.

She smiled at Julio. He looked embarrassed for some reason.

She walked forward to Xavier and laid a hand on his back.

“What're you drinking tonight?” She had learned of Xavier's past and taunted him mercilessly about it.

“The best money can buy for my fair lady!” He said, raising a glass of a putrid, yet very strong foreign drink.

“If that’s the best money can buy, I'd hate to see what they give out for free!” She said, grabbing a mug from the counter. It filled instantly with the same type of liquid. She grinned and held up the mug to the air.

Petrov looked at it, a passing confusion running across his face as he tried to figure out how the glass had been filled. He shrugged.

“Watch what you say about my swill, or I'll throw you out!” He roared with a smile.

“Your? Petrov do you brew your own stuff?” Mia asked, clinking her glass with Xavier.

“I do indeed!” Petrov beamed.

Mia craned her neck behind Petrov at the disgusting back kitchen. “Huh.” She said, then, regarding the mug in front of her, drained it anyway.

“Julio, what are you doing all the way over there? Come on!” She yelled across the room.

Julio perked up at his name, looked conflicted for a moment then came over and sat next to Xavier.

“Hows it going man?” he asked, bumping his fist against the other man's hand. “I heard there was some protesting in Mara, that your thing?”

“Hell no. Fuck politics. I've been burned enough by that shit.” Xavier cursed. “Probably just the damn pilot's guild acting up again. They should space the lot of the fuckers. Anyone can fly a plane. Shit, even I can.”

Bernice stormed into the room with Bryce behind her. The airlock shuddered concerningly. “Those fucking assholes closed the god damn space port. How the fuck are the rest of us supposed to trade anything if they keep on blocking the fucking thing?”

They were both wearing actual vac suits, if shitty, worn ones. She hurled her helmet to the floor where it skidded into a corner. Bryce looked at the helmet with a pained expression before going to retrieve it. The suits were probably his.

“One more week of this shit and we'll really be fucked.” She grunted, struggling out of her suit revealing sweat stained clothes underneath.

The suit collapsed on the floor in a pile and she advanced to the bar, throwing herself into the stool next to Mia.

“You and I are drinking for sure tonight” She said, grinning. “May be the last of the money anyway...”

“Petrov, if you may?”

He fake bowed and procured a mug from somewhere and filled it with his vile concoction.

“Thats the third straight week they've barred anyone from getting to the port. People are getting real pissed, but word is that the guard are sympathetic. They wont act, it seems.” Bryce explained to the assembly.

“I mean, people have ships stuck there. Somethings going to turn nasty. Stay away from the port for a bit and just let it all blow over.”

Bernice sputtered in the middle of her drink with Mia and turned back on Bryce. “How am I supposed to pay for anything if I can't trade our goods?” Bryce shrugged.

“Thats why you should have gone in with me on those drugs. At least those can be sold locally.”

Bernice rolled her eyes in frustruation and swung back towards the bar.

“Ah, speaking of payment...” Petrov said holding up a finger. He gestured towards a small screen he held. It displayed Bernice's balance.

She scowled. “Now don't you fucking start too. The port just needs to open and all this shit will settle out.”

“How have yall been doing?” She said to everyone but mostly Mia.

“With all you lovely people, business has never been better. And now we have the lovely Mia. Balances have never been better. Now if only you people would actually pay them off once and a while...” Petrov twiddled his fingers, whistling innocently.

“No one asked you, Bourgeoisie.” Bernice said with a pout.

“Thats rich coming from you!” Xavier laughed. “How quickly they forget the collar and tie for the garb of the working class!” He said gesturing towards Bernice.

She pouted even more. “How about you Mr money bags? Got any jobs for us?”

Xavier adjusted his shirt with indigence. “I'll have you know I spent all of my inheritance last year when the price of iron crashed. I've been living with my Aunt all this time. I'm as poor as the rest of you.”

“Huh. How about you, Julio?”

“Well, I've got some cash lying around from old jobs, but nothing major. You know this shit is risky stuff though right? We all should all just be like Udaygo. What a goody-fucking-two-shoes.”

“Whats he up to?” Mia asked.

“Got himself a real job as a mechanic at the station. I think he may be bringing in more than anyone here combined.”

Bernice whistled. “So I know whos paying for drinks tonight!” She said with glee, but a quick look around the bar dampened her spirits.

“Hey where is he anyway?”

Julio slipped a smile. “Well, you know, he's working!”

Bernice slapped her face. Xavier groaned. Petrov chuckled. “What a waste of ones life huh?” Bryce said, likely sarcastically.

“I suppose its going to be a short night then.” Bernice said putting on a fake frown as she comically overturned her wallet on to the bar. Only a few chips fell out.

A sudden urge came to me.

“Not necessarily.” I interjected.

“You didn't ask me.” I said, getting to my feet and walking towards the bar with a sly smile on my face. The others regarded me with curiosity.

“You got something there?” Xavier asked.

“Lets just say all you fools owe me.” I slipped a hand into my cloak and procured the ore I had ran across yesterday. I let it fall to the bar with a thunk.

“Why did you just drop a rock on my bar?” Petrov asked. “Have you folks gotten so low you expect me to accept stones as payment now?” He asked indignantly.

But Bernice's eyebrows raised.

“Hmm.” She turned the rock over in her hands. “Is this titanium? I thought they had stripped all of that out a long time ago.”

She looked up at me, a sparkle in her eyes. “Did… did you find a new deposit someone missed?”

But I had to shake my head.

“No, just this one guy and a truck full of his friends. As far as I can tell, he's pretty high quality though. I should be able to sell him to someone in Mara even with the pilots messing with things.”

I paused.

“So, uh, drinks are on me.”

The bar exploded with cheers. I was suddenly surrounded with people hugging me and clapping me on the back.

I was ushered as guest of honor to the bar, where I so infrequently sat, and was bedecked with a large iron band someone had found on the wall, which apparently I was supposed to wear as a circlet. “All hail the sovereign!” Bernice cheered.

I looked over at Martha, who everyone else had forgotten. She looked up at me.

“You too. Us loners have to keep together.” I said, gesturing for her to come over.

She let out a sigh, but then smiled as well. “Very well. What are we drinking?”

Bernice looked at Mia's glass. “What *are* we drinking? The radiator fluid?”

“Not yet!” Xavier quipped. “Give it a few more weeks.”

The crowd assembled at the bar and everyone got glasses and cheered one another, cursed Udaygo for abandoning us, cursed the poor trade, cursed the government, cheered Petrov and the bar.

But I watched it happen as if from a distance, although I was right beside them.

As so very often it did, my thought became contimplative.

I felt off. I felt wrong. Or at least something was wrong. I was only three drinks in, so it couldn't be that, even drinking Petrov's unfortunate creation.

What was wrong?

One thing was clear. My head had been preoccupied ever since the god decided to grace our bar with her prescience.

To be sure, our was not an elite group, but surely a select one. We were one with our sorrows and complaints. The comraderie was key, and something not easy found.

It was also true that I had, despite my circumstances, wanted so hard to come to the groups good graces. Ironic, especially since the group was simply a collection of washed out has-beens, but it seems like social acceptance was one hell of a drug; and one that I was addicted to.

As I thought harder, the more I realized suddenly things about myself and my relation to the others that had always been true and perhaps obvious to others, but hidden to my own consciousness.

For one, it was that I truly *did* want to be accepted by these people. That itself was a revelation, and one that I would have to think about more in depth when I staggered back to my own bed and lay awake in the hovel of a space I called my own.

Secondly, I, for some reason, did not accept the fact that I had been accepted. This fact was more shocking. Hadn't I been here for neigh on close to two years? Hadn't I been at the bottom of the bottom? Did I not deserve the recognition of my poverty of opportunity, the same as the rest?

But there was the problem. They *had* accepted me. They had accepted me. In fact, I reason that they had done it fairly quickly. How had I not noticed? When had they started trying to get me over to the bar; to joining in on their conversations and games; the banter that they had always aimed in my direction despite my laconicness.

I was surrounded by them now. So far away from my usual corner. They were *all* here. At least all except Udaygo. And they were cheering with me, cheering me… Such an alien concept… I felt so out of place in this acceptance, so unbelieving that such a happenstance could occur with such ease…

Well, that was just it wasn't it? *I* felt out of place. *I* was the one who so brusquelly brushed off their attempts to communicate with me. It was *I* who normally sat in my corner nursing my beer alone. And more than that, I was the only one standing between me, and the acceptance I apparently had been craving. How strange.

It was now several hours later and the celebration had died down. The lights were dim. Even Petrov had partaken in the festivities, which was quite unusual for him.

I cast a glance at the collection of men and women slumped against the bar and seat. Drool ran out of some of their mouths and the instantly recognizable stench of beer was ever present. I would ask Petrov to help clean tomorrow.

The soft hum of the air scrubbers filled the room. Everything was silent and still except for me. I looked once more over the assembled people, a sudden emotion peicing my heart. The realness and intensity of it staggered me, almost collapsed me physcially. I took a step to right myself, wading mentally through the alcohol clouding my mind.

What was it? I wondered, my eyes shimmering, my sight becoming obscured behind the wavy blurry lines of tears.

Could it be love?

I caught sight of the god and my tears froze in place. The emotion aborted as quickly and drastically as it had arrived. I did not know why.

I shook my head trying to understand the sudden change. And as I did so, I got the feeling that the god was almost definitely awake.

The terror of such an encounter between me and that god, right there, with everone asleep, without any one of the familiar faces observing the two of us somehow frightened me beyond anything I had experienced in my entire life.

The very thought that at any second the greasy haired woman would lurch from her stool and turn, her blazing eyes catching me in their gaze, that holy light filling the space around the through her, and then she would speak suddenly, seeing me there alone, and the words…

It would surely kill me.

My heart like ice, and sweating with horror, having fixated in my mind, the very image of such a situation... I leapt fully to my feet, all intoxication having been burned off in a moment of emotion.

I dashed towards the entrance, hoping beyond anything that the god remained still; that she would not wake and stop me with a word. I was sure that if that would happen I would truly, surely be lost

I grabbed my suit and engaging the compression doors, fled into the night.

The drive between the bar and my hovel was an hour. It was closer to the station than the bar, but not by much. The others did not know this. No one had ever seen my place. Perhaps they had asked in the past, but I had certainly not answered them. I had liked to keep alone. And perhaps, I was discovering, that was a mistake.

The darkness of the martian night filled the land. Off in the distance, past the crags of red stone, Mara lay, far and out of mind, only really a *suggestion,* embodied through the dull glow which threatened to creep over the horizon's jagged peaks. More closely, the station sat in its depression, the white glow of lights on the outside of the hab giving the whole settlement a somewhat ghostly feel.

My small buggy had no pressurized cabin; I could not afford such luxuries, and the darkness of the night lent a cold, even through my suit and alcohol filled body.

My helmet was caked with dried mud. Condensation filled on the inside of it, as it often did. Yet this time, hitting the discrepancy between the relatively warm inner air and the frigid lack of atmosphere caused the vapor to freeze in delicate crystals on the inner part of my vision.

My arms absorbed the shock of rolling over a particularly large rock. If I overturned, and the buggy was ruined, I would have to walk, and I had forgotten to fill the spare oxygen tanks in my haste to leave.

So I ran my small craft as carefully as I could manage, the ghosts of rocks appearing one after another in an endless treadmill before me as the lights of the buggy caught them.

The god was the key to things.

Why did I dislike her?

Obviously it was the terror of being obliterated, as she had done to Carlos. That was a rational feeling to have.

Yet was it? It had been weeks now since she had joined us and she had never displayed any hint of violence, even at her most intoxicated. In fact, she seemed to become more genial as the night went on. She wasn't anything to be afraid of, if like the others, you ignored her godliness.

My thoughts went back to the day when she had so casually entered the bar, into our world.

The world went by in silent and darkness shrouded being. The bulk of it lay off my lights, and passed unseen: huge impact craters, the treacherous gravel pits, the tailings of the mines, all passing unseen and yet not unfelt to my sides.

She entered, her halo shining behind her. I was again, speechless.

My world was a little patch of light within the darkness, which sped along. Imagine if it could exist detached from me and my bike. As it drifted unaccompanied through the empty darkened land, what would it think of the Mars we had made as it ran its brightness against it?

In some ways, it was unfair. How was it that such a being could, without even a thought, enter so intimately with the group of men and women who had bonded over *years*? What loss or what price had been paid in order to gain acceptance to our esteemed group?

It was jealousy then, I realized; in a land of only red, the green monster had reared its head. I chuckled to myself at the stupid joke and in celebration of the fact that I had arrived unscratched at my meager hovel.

I parked my buggy under the hole filled tarp and tied it down. The winds had been worse lately and the sandstorms more fierce. It wouldn't do to wake up and find it in disrepair, covered with that coarse sand which so easily destroyed everything it could find…

It stumbled to the airlock of the ruined spacecraft and riddled with the controls. The manual latch was getting harder and harder to open. I would have to take a look at it, but was not quite sure what I would do when I diagnosed its condition.

Luckily, tonight it opened true once again, and the blackness of the cabinet sized space enclosed me like a second suit.

I ran my hands over the inner surface of the pressure chamber until I found the second latch and, putting all the strength I could summon into the latch, heaved until it engaged with a protest, air hissing into the chamber, slowly equalizing the pressures.

I waited until I could no longer hear the hiss of air. I checked the dial on the outside of my suit, and unattached my helmet.

The air smelled like dirt and human. There were some things you could not get out of the air even with scrubbers. I checked the oxygen levels. I checked the battery. I double checked the battery. I checked the air-scrubber diagnostics, namely, was the thing still making a horrible grating noise? It was. Good. There was no threat of that intermittent chinking sound which had caused my blood to run cold just a week ago.

I slipped into my well worn hammock.

My thoughts were then free to travel through the interior of the crashed ship, through the thin atmosphere chocked with dust and dirt, and finally leave this forsaken rock of a planet, and travel to the stars where they belonged. All through the small, meticulously cleaned port hole above me.

Why couldn't I have been a god?

I fell asleep.

I woke. I felt changed. The hammock swung out from under my body and my feet found the floor with a metallic thud. The sun was already starting to pierce the body of my little enclosure, and filled the room with light.

The red dirt and dust clumped on the raised tread pattern of the cold floor. The air circulation system had turned on and spread it around, dirtying the walls and the intakes with blasted red patterns.

A had wiped the sleep from my eyes and I prepared for the hour long process it would take to clean the whole system, in and out. In vac, air filtration was nothing to laugh about unless you liked laughing to death. But that didn't make it any more enjoyable.

Mindless work made for drifting thoughts, and I found myself reflecting on the events of the previous night.

Unrequested, my mind made an image of the bar as I went to leave, everyone slumped against the ground, the god, playing at sleep, sneaking a look upwards towards me.

I shivered and felt a nagging sensation that I had before, that I *knew* something about the god. Surely it was no coincidence that she would have entered the bar when I was there; that she would have chosen my bar (and for once I did think of it as *my* bar, that particular inferior inferiority seemed to have worked itself out last night for good)

Everything seemed to be too much of a coincidence.

Now suited, my gloved hands searched the exterior of the jerry rigged air exchange unit looking for the latch to take out and replace the filter. Ideally, the filter unit would be inside the pressurized system, and usually it was. This was not an ideal system.

To be sure, I had some sort of part to play in everything here, and it was just a matter of time until I figured out what was going on. Although everything was confusing now, I suddenly became assured that the mystery of the god would unravel, the more I applied thought towards the situation.

The filter closed, now clean. I looked at the unit and estimated that I had another month or two with it. The dull yellow dented exterior said that it was a cheap one, surely second hand. I knew the company somewhat. They had a reputation for cost effectiveness and nothing else. Not the kind of product you would like to entrust your life to. But sometimes you didn't have a choice.

I grabbed some things from inside and got on my small buggy and made towards Mara. It would take the better part of the day, despite the seeming closeness. Distances were deceptive when you could see so far. The day was clear and crisp. A beautiful Martian summer.

And my mind wandered again as I rode the buggy through the interminable wastes between Station and Mara: the heights tantalizingly close yet always so far away.

So there was something going on with the god, but there was something else going on as well. Since when had I thought so hard about anything? Since when had I been so self reflective as well?

All that I could answer was that, at least several years ago I could not remember thinking things over to this same level of detail. Were things more reactive? Were situations easier? It was not clear. There was the truth that between the time I had arrived on Mars, and now, I had somehow become more self reflective. And that trend had lead its way to here. Right now. This situation. Where I was sitting on my buggy staring out of my suit and watching the desert race away around me. This was now. And so was now, and again and again.

I got off the buggy. It was hours later. The sun indicated slightly after midday. I locked up the buggy in an area where it was unlikely to be stolen and strode purposefully towards the office. Fortunately the office was outside of the main hab system so I didn't have to put up with any of the time or annoyance of the formal pressurization procedure.

I kept the helmet in my hand and stared and the tired man at the desk.

“Next!” He called out in a tired voice.

The titanium got a bit more than I had expected.

That was good, since things were constantly breaking, and I had no stable source of income. It was likely that at some point my luck would run out and I would be forced to beg or resort to other means to obtain money, but for now, that eventuality had been pushed back another month or more, depending on how much of a deal I could get on a new air filter.

Had I always been here on Mars?

With a strained smile of confusion from inside my helmet I found that I could honestly not remember. Had the years addled my brain so that I could not remember what had transpired before I had landed on this forsaken red hunk of rock?

Wasn't there some family or friends on old earth, or perhaps another colony wondering in the back of their minds what had happened to me? Or was I alone?

Well, I certainly was alone now.

I stopped the buggy suddenly and looked around the desert. It was perhaps another two or three hours out to my destination. There was not a soul on the desert. I had chosen the straight line route, rather than going through Station, as most people would have.

I stared off at the desolateness of the world. The sun glared down against me, and I could feel the warmth of the radiation through the suit. I stopped and dismounted from my buggy.

The elements of my life seemed so familiar. The ship, the bar, the buggy, the Station, everything. But I could not remember how I had gotten here. It was like a dream. Everything was only a vague memory of familiarity.

And that filled me with existential terror like never before.

Right now, at this second, there could be nothing more horrifying. Who was I? What was I doing?

I scanned the desert again, turning my gaze in the full circle. I was out far enough that both Mara and Station were obscured by the rise of the land.

I slowly let out a choking hurried laugh and let the air in my lungs escape in that long and steadily increasing laugh. It was a humor born out of terror, of meaninglessness and impossibility.

If I stopped here and died at my feet, no one would find me for years. The others might wonder. They might even look for me, but not out here in the desert. The red sand would cover the glass of my suit face and cover it so that they couldn't even see my true face within. And then, day by day, year by year, it would slowly gain around me until finally, even if someone managed to come to this exact spot, impossible as that was, they would not see me. I would be under them, completely eaten by Mars.

I realized that I was still laughing. It was strange since the closeness of the sound in my suit, I could not tell whether I was or was not.

I collapsed to my knees next to the buggy and looked at my gloved hands.

Who was I?

I became more and more desperate for an answer to that question.

I could not remember coming to the planet. Yet clearly I had been here for years. I had memories of the area. I had been to the bar for years as well. They all knew me and I knew them. I knew their names and hobbies and likes and dislikes, and it was even possible that they knew some of mine. I knew my way to all the places around my hovel. And of course I did have that hovel. Someone had jerry rigged the filter system, and fixed the door and most importantly, ever so importantly, **installed the skylight so I could see the stars**.

Who could have have done that other than me?

So why couldn't I remember any of it?

Sweat ran along my body from inside my suit and my muscles screamed as I realized I had been clenching my entire body from fear.

I was having some sort of panic attack and I breathed hard to try to counter the nervous after shocks. I had to find the answers. I had to act against these horrid dreadful throughts. I had to understand. I had to figure out what was going on, what had happened to my memories. Why hadn't I cared about this yesterday? Or the day before, or the day before that? Or the years before that? What had happened to me?

My hand reached out with true purpose and clenched the throttle, muscle acting where brain could not. And body followed out of habit. The buggy was beneath me again and I screamed across the flatness of the desert like a missile. The buggy could handle it just this once. I was a righteous fury, full of nothing but directed uninformed rage.

I had to know! The metamorphosis of my thought had only one reasonable explanation, from unknowing beast-like reaction to this horrifying self conscious present: the god. She had done this to me. In one stare.

I could see it now!

The eyes piercing the dirty hair, halo reaching out threadlike, whispering through dimensions only of the mind and piercing my stupor. A direct shot of life to the zombie-like existence which had until previously been mine.

I had to know why!

And when I had reached the bar, just as the sun was starting to set beyond the cliffs once more, I knew why. The purity of understanding had been found.

The pressure door to the building closed with a loud bang and I strode with fury into the dusky bar.

“Mia!” I growled.

The patrons of the bar looked up in surprise at the rash and sudden interruption. The night was just starting.

The god looked back startled, and her eyes widened. She understood something in my hatred,

My teeth bared as I strode forward. My old cloak whipped around me, the red dust evaporating off of it into nothingness, revealing the drab uniform which had always been underneath.

“Whats wrong?” Petrov asked me as I stormed forward.

I grabbed the god by the throat and lifted her high off the ground.

“What- You mad fucking...!” She choked on her words.

“Remember!” I thundered at her, locking eyes with her, yet never flinching. The time of fear was done. It was done forever.

She jerked in my grasp, trying to look away, but for the same reason so long ago, when I had first seen her, she could not.

Her eyes widened and in her terror tried to fight me. The iron inhuman strength of her hands was met however, by a similar and unyielding strength from my own.

“Remember!” I yelled again.

She squirmed and thrashed, an unholy throat tearing cry wrenching its way out of her lungs.

“Put her the fuck down!” Petrov cried out, gun in hand. “What the fuck has gotten into you?”

Bryce also had leveled a pistol at my head.

“Put her down.” he said, a bit more calmly.

“No.” I said, loud over Mia's now continuous wail. “Drop your weapons.”

The weapons clattered to the ground. They looked confused. Bryce frowned, and looked down at the gun in disbelief.

“Both of you, over there.”

They walked over to the corner.

“Martha! You too!”

Martha froze at her table. Her legs straightened themselves and walked over to the corner, bringing her with them.

Mia struggled to say something and I released my grip slightly.

“I- I don't want to...” She admitted.

I shook my head. “We have to end this.” I said. “We both have to remember.”

Mia gridded her teeth and looked back at me.

The bar and Petrov slipped away. Mars tumbled out of existence. Everything folded into nothingness, and we were left alone, the god and I, in the expanse of stars.

She looked different in some manner. I realized that her hair was no longer ill kept. And she wore the same uniform as I. We hovered in space, the backdrop of a massive planet behind us. I no longer held her.

“I can't let this continue.” She said. “This is no life. This is no existence for anyone. I- I have terrors at night. I can't sleep. The images of the things I've seen and done haunt me. And to think ithat its just going to continue… to get worse even… My mind can't comprehend it. It has to stop! It has to stop before there's nothing let of me!” She cried out, holding her head in her hands.

A deep sadness ran over me. “For what its worth, I agree with you. But I simply don't see how we can stop this. Its ironic given our powers, but I feel just as powerless as I do strong. How could you stop this? The administrators have us by the neck. They'll learn about this conversation in minutes! How will you deal with that?”

“I- I will do what I should have done a long time ago: break this whole system of abuse and terror.”

My heart soared for a moment. Was such a thing possible? Could the years of slavery be ended? Could she actually do what she suggested? But just as quickly, it sank.

“Its impossible. I've tried before. We all have. And the administrators laughed at us the whole time. The inhibitor cant be destroyed. Thats the whole point right? Create gods, then keep them on a leash. Even the fact that we can have this conversation is amazing.”

But Mia shook her head. “I can destroy it. And I will. The fact that you cannot conceive of its destruction is the cause of its invincibility. I thought about this for a long time. Its power relies on the restriction of the subconscious. I'm going to burn it all away.”

“What are you suggesting?” I asked, a hint of fear in my voice. What she was suggesting was terrifying, yet so desired that I could hardly ask that question.

“You will see. We have run out of time.” She said solemnly. “I am tired of the death, and the destruction. I will put an end to it, even if it means the end of me.” She blinked out of existence.

I hung in space. Time had changed. It was some time later. My mind felt fuzzy, as if I was barely there. I drifted in space, clutching my head, and could do nothing but stare at the horror in front of me.

She had done it. Somehow. Rage or sadness, or justice. Something had allowed her to actually stop it. She had destroyed herself to do it, I had seen, unable to act from thousands of miles away. Whatever used to be her, had been destroyed completely, that was the trick. To do something we had all tried but had never succeeded. Of course, who would accept the complete destruction of their consciousness?

And it was not worth it.

The planet below shattered before my eyes. The molten core oozing from many continent size cracks. The whole thing was ripping apart slowly. The atmosphere was searing off before my eyes, the work of a century vanishing in a mere second.

I could see, just barely, the cities below, and doubled over in nausea in thinking how many people were down there. At the center of the destruction the anomaly expanded slowly, the area of exotic matter ripping through the crust and displacing everything in its path, pulling in the doomed civilian ships which tried to escape the planet's fate.

She had done it. But gods, at what a cost…

Around us hung the remains of ships. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. They had tried to stop her the poor fools. Thousands of wrecks drifted in space around a planet which in hours would not exist. Smashed twisted metal swirled. One and a while, a secondary system would ignite with a sudden silent explosion. And the bodies… Frozen in space drifting with the rest of the fragments.

Somewhere around in the debris hung the rest of the man made gods. Her fury had known no end.

I stared at the scene, the red of the explosions, the blue of the planet, slowly fading into the blackness of space.

She had succeeded, but at a cost. A terrible cost. A cost much higher than the benefit. Inconceivably higher than anything she or I would have wanted. Yet here it was. Death and destruction all around us, the same as before, yet now on a scale so unfathomable that it staggered the mind. It was evil. Pure evil.

I held out my hands to stop the sight of it, but I could not. I could still see it in my minds eye. And so a sudden thought appeared in my head.

I reached out, knowing it could not be done, and tried to fix what she had broken. I felt the impossibility of the task before me, but knew that it must be done. It must be tried, for to be confronted by such a thing and to not try to stop it was tantamount to committing the destruction myself.

For a brief moment the slow fragmentation of the planet stopped, and the ships around me self assembled piece by piece, my mind racing hard, harder than it had ever done in the past.

Ships snapped into wholeness, men and women reassembled, their suits repaired.

They were all dead, frozen and gone, yet I could not allow that to be, and so I pushed, much harder and more furiously than I ever had in all the years. And crossed thousands of lines of once ingrained protocol, going infinitely farther than what could have even been possible if the inhibitor still existed.

The planet below me nudged slightly. My mind latched onto the pieces, dragging it back together, foot by foot.

The effort was excruciating, but I could not allow myself to stop or falter. It had to be reversed. It could be reversed. It took only the application of mind. It must be. I had to do it. I couldn't fail.

Blood dripped from my nose and colored my eyes misty red, and a red hot sensation, as if a brand could be felt being inserted forcibly into the back of my head, and yet I continued my efforts.

Continents, wrecked by terrible rents, inched back into place, cities smashed by gravitational forces slipped back into form.

With an even greater effort I willed the people back to life.

A blackness full of liquid pain was searing through my head. I could feel it consuming me. And I pushed on.

I pushed until I could see the lights on the ships around me turn back on, until I could sense the inhabitants rise slowly from their feet, the icy cold of vacuum still running off them like water.

And I pushed more, holding the planet in my hands, and pushed it back together, healing the cracks. Slipping the frozen pieces of core back to its proper place. The seams joining with one another slowly.

Hours slipped by as I held on. Below, the cities surge with life once more. People dusted themselves off, crying out in wonder and embracing one another.

Tears mixed with blood, freezing instantly, my face crusted with the effort of a god.

The only thing left… the anomaly. I went to move it.

It would not move. Panic ran through me, diminished by the dull throbbing of my mind as it destroyed itself from the effort.

Then I would remove it.

It would not be removed.

Then I would move the planet.

I did not have the strength.

Then I would save the men and women, if not the planet.

I began the task of transferring them to the convenient fleet which now existed around me, while I pushed the ships as far as I could with the little strength I had left.

But finally, with a dull snap, barely seconds into the process, my strength ran out. And my mind went black.

I awoke to a scene not much different from what had existed before. The vast majority of people were dead. I could not save them there was no power left in my body, perhaps there would never be again. I could feel parts of my brain that were dead forever. Consciousness wavered before me.

It couldn't be. It couldn't be allowed. It could not go unpunished.

Despite the years of slavery, despite the mental anguish and torture, freedom was not worth this. It could not be worth this. The lives of a handful over billions… My breathing grew ragged from emotion and tears escaped my eyes only to freeze on the outside of my face in the vacuum. My hands found themselves in fists and a horrible cry of anguish escaped from my throat, silent and wordless in the empty space.

If there was justice in this universe, if there was even a speck of humanity left, I had to see it done. I had to right this somehow. I stared at my hands in silent agony trying to think about how I could right such a thing.

I knew Mia better than anyone. She and I had traveled together for years, facing the daunting and horrifying tasks forced on us. Through my muddled and dying mind, I tried to predict where I could find her, where she would go… She had always wanted freedom; the space and independence. She had often talked of Mars. The word was like a paradise to her.

And so I slipped through space, landing bodily, smashing into the surface right beside a crashed spaceship. I could feel my mind running from me as I quickly formed a suit around me. I would have to trust my subconscious, that I would be drawn to her, that I would have to find her, despite everything. I would have to see justice done one day. One day…

I stared up at the stars above and lost myself.

I still had a hand on Mia, but it had slipped weakly to her shoulder. We shuddered as the collective memory ended.

“You tried to fix it. That was brave of you. I'm so sorry, when I ad to destroy the inhibitor, I could not even remember myself.”

I shook my head.

“There can be no apology for your actions. Only the price.”

He head hung limply.

“You once said, that you were going to fix the wrong, the slavery in which they held us. Then I shall fix the original wrong, the creation of us gods to begin with.”

My hand tightened on her shoulder.

She looked at me plaintively. “Despite everything...” She started, “I still dont want to die.” She admitted.

“No one does.” I responded, and destroyed the last bits of godhood from the universe.

Petrov held a glass high into the air.

“To Mars! The filthiest land of opportunity!” He cried out. “And the only place for new beginnings!”

Xavier cheered. Bryce and Bernice cheered. Udaygo and Julio cheered. Martha cheered.

They were all here.

Blushing, Mia and I cheered. To new beginnings.