Bhim Nimgade - Harvest for the Dying

Our team has streamed into the bleached zones, looking for the faded blue of the dying eyes of the last creatures of a dying race. The streaming, because nobody can go there in flesh bodies, is necessary, but it is not perfect. Across the hot, hot sands, our human-type bodies would require such expensive protection and infrastructure that the funding groups would never acquiesce.

Still, those dying eyes must be found. Every one that sinks to the heated ground and closes forever, to shrivel away, is a wasted treasure, and opportunity. They have lived, and breathed, and thought, and struggled, and then have come to the end. But yes, we can still glean and gather what we can, and while we can.

The sky is pale and hot. Radiation pours down from the sky, visible light of course, but also other ferocious frequencies. There is no sun, no focal point, for these energies, but they come down on us from all angles, from everywhere. There is no escape from their merciless glare.

Traversing a hillock, strewn with stones, it is hard to not to feel like any step could be a wrong step, leading to a stumble, and then a fall to perdition. But we are streaming. In a sense, we are not really there.

Our prey is not hiding. There is precious little cover, just endless undulating lands with stones and sand and sandless domes of rock. But those that we seek are small, in this vastness, and there are not many of them.

Each life, I think, is a world; and a life lost, is a world lost. And so I stride, virtually, across the land, searching, far from the others on my team, but still connected, somehow. I don’t see them, and they don’t see me, but we all trust that we are there, and connected, to each other, and to our leader, and to Central..

There - a hint of something in the distance, something not a rock or stone or sand. I pick up my pace. I turn down the contrast in my visuals, turn down the brightness, and there it is. One of the dying.

It does not turn to look at me as I approach. I do not know, but I don’t think that there is anything for it to see, or to hear. It is dying - they all are. And I am here, in time, to bear witness, and to do the gleaning. It is still standing, supporting itself above the hot ground, but it won’t be for long, it seems. Its ungainly limbs seem to quiver, like a distant mirage. I have to prepare for the capture.

Its head is dipping, and its eyes are closing. They open just a little bit, sometimes, showing a touch of bleached and faded blue, and then they start to close again. In the silence, so close to it, its breath becomes audible, if it is indeed breathing. Something slow, and raggedly rhythmical. There is so much light, and I inject it into my body, my not-there body, and I let my arms rise up and embrace this creature. I absorb into myself the images, the sense-impressions, the attachments, the kaleidoscope of emotional states, the memories, the whirling cacophony of wisdom and venality and kindness and brutality. It washes over me and through me in a rush, too fast for me to experience any one thing, but rather experiencing it all at once.

It was forever in a moment, a world in a grain of sand. I stepped back, overcome.

“Go, then,” I said. “Your days have come to an end. You are walking from the lands of the living, to another land. All those fetters which have bound you to this existence are falling away.”

I had a vision, from another world far away, of bhikkhus with their palms pressed together, chanting and bowing gently forward, welcoming another creature to glide from one state of existence to the next. That image, or memory maybe, has always helped to comfort and steady me, on each mission. I shared it; though I do not know if it helped this lone creature, in its passing, on this strange world far away.

I feel the call from Central. Time to depart. Even our streaming virtual bodies have to flee this place. The world shimmers and dissolves, and everything that I am attenuates into a stream of dancing particles, and my final memory is the acrid smell of stardust.