

## *The World Sculptor*

There is an office so well shrouded that only a carefully curated few know of its existence. There is nothing ordinary about this office. It is old, the scent of must emanating from every surface. Against one wall rests a rickety old chair and an accompanying desk, and against another stand rows of filing cabinets labeled with careful, elegant script. The office has no windows and no doors, but its sole occupant enters regardless.

The artist is ageless, their eyes twinkling with boundless creativity and delight. The corner of the artist's mouth is always turned up in a small smile, the origin of their amusement a carefully guarded secret. Their calloused hands constantly move, flying from adjusting their silvery hair to fiddling with a button on their shirt.

They sit at the desk, reaching deep into one of its many drawers and pulling out a handful of burning magma. They knead it between their fingers, forming it into a spherical shape. The shape is too big at first, so they set it to the side, the wood of their desk charring as molten rock sears it. They draw another fistful of magma from the desk, but are not pleased with that one either. They weigh the two forms, one in each hand, with a small frown. Frustrated, they smash them together, and end up with two shapes- a larger sphere, and a smaller one orbiting the first and rapidly beginning to cool.

The magma of the main body begins to cool, steam rising off of it and collecting around the sphere. When the cloud gets heavy enough, it changes states once more—not into a gas this time, but a liquid. Water drains from the atmosphere of the shape to its surface, collecting into a giant pool.

The artist considers their project for a moment, then takes a few pinches of magma. They place them strategically around the rock base of their project, forming them into volcanoes. After thousands of years, the volcanoes have all erupted, forming land masses around the shape.

The geology of the shape is taking form nicely, but the artist still feels something is missing. They spin the orb around and around, studying it from every angle. It looks similar to the countless projects they've completed before this—a volcanic rock that will lose its ocean in a few millennia—but it doesn't *feel* quite right. And so, the artist decides to try something new.

They sketch a microscopic speck, tiny and insignificant, and bring it into being. It doesn't do much—it consumes volcanic minerals at the ocean floor for nutrition, and can make identical copies of itself to survive. It lives in the blink of an eye, and when its time comes, it ceases to be. The artist smiles as they release a handful of these into the inhospitable oceans and recline. They've tried experiments like this before. None of them have worked.

The specks are still around after a few thousand years. Actually, they've changed, and they keep changing as time progresses. They adapt and evolve to any danger in their environment. Some specks have grouped up into strange marine lifeforms that swim around and consume *each other* for energy. The artist holds their breath. None of their other experiments have lasted this long or come this far.

Life flourishes before the artist as it creates plants, animals, and other forms of beings. Several times, the artist frets as most of it dies before them., but life always continues—evolving, adapting, *overcoming*. It surges out of the ocean and covers the continents, turning them lush and green, overrun with wonderful creatures. Massive reptiles rule the land, sea, and sky for a while, before perishing when some loose magma brushes against the project. New,

warm-blooded creatures appear next, making themselves known as the world grows cold. In particular, a species of bipedal primates catches the artist's eye.

This creature does not seem special at first. It lives in small groups, hunting its prey to survive. But as time goes by, it adapts much quicker than the other animals—not physically, perhaps, but mentally. It forges tools from the earth the artist provided, and learns how to make the land grow food for them.

They call themselves "humans," and soon, they've spread all over the rock. They shape the artist's land to build structures, calling groups of them cities, and groups of cities nations. They live and die in the blink of an eye, dreaming of gods that shaped their world, deities eerily similar to the artist.

*Oh, do they create.* War chariots rampage across Eurasia, and archers set their arrows alight before firing to maximize the death they can administer. They harness the artist's power into explosives meant for mining but repurposed for war.

The artist is sickened by war. Their creations slaughter themselves mercilessly for what they believe to be a noble cause. The artist sees nothing noble about it. Even in times of relative peace, the humans are still fighting. Murderers and thieves con and kill every day that passes. The artist is almost ready to scrap their project and start anew, but something catches their eye.

Amidst all of the chaos in their project, they see something else. Humans help each other, generously donating to one another in times of need, or sharing a particularly bountiful harvest. The closer the artist looks, the more of these instances they find. They feel immense pride in their creations. And then, on a continent the humans have named "North America," they see a bright flash.

The humans have harnessed the power of their very building blocks to build bombs capable of wiping themselves out in the midst of a global war. In

the blink of an eye, more nations have built and tested these weapons, and every one of them tensely hovers over the trigger.

It is almost time for the artist to submit their project, but they are entranced by this deadly stalemate their work has found itself in. They hold their breath as years slowly tick by and no action is taken. But then, they remember the potential for humans to build instead of destroy. All around them, they see great works—elegant buildings, impressive charities, and *kindness*.

They cradle their planet in their hands and smile. They have faith in their creations to maintain their kindness. They take their planet and place it in a solar system, third from the Sun, and whisper its name.

*Earth.*