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Title: Rain

Competition group: B

Rain

Dripping. Falling. Flowing. Always in motion. Always cascading towards some ultimate destination just a little further ahead.

Unstoppable bullets of water flew into the greasy glass of a draughty, cracked window. Fired sideways by the icy lashing fingers of the wind, they sent shockwaves of pain through the walls of the degrading building on their way towards the already sodden ground. People glanced out of their windows with disdain, wishing that they could be somewhere else. Somewhere brighter. Somewhere... happier. Cascading through marble runs of leaf and wood, drop after drop found its way into every crevice and hole imaginable; trees were drowned, unlucky walkers drenched, streets transformed into oceans and canals for unceasing torrents of bitterly cold water.

Eventually this brutal battering of the landscape ended, and bruised foliage released the final missiles of the assault to complete their mission and slam into the squelching, swampy moss and mud beneath. The grey, dismal clouds retreated, allowing the landscape an opportunity to recover and recuperate. As rays of sunshine illuminated the numerous tunnels and chambers of miserable houses, a few brave but misguided residents stepped out of their safe, comforting nest, into the flooded, stunned area. Only a couple of them survived more than a metre or two before being caught out by the treacherous terrain and its freezing seas of custard-like mud.

Swarms of tiny droplets, flung like a toddler's unsatisfactory food items, down from an archipelago of grey, monotonous islands, together form an organised yet chaotic army of projectiles, united in their assault upon the beings and scenery down below. Like a colony of ants, or a society of humans, they combine to create a grand and unstoppable force of nature.

While the unpleasant downpours do come to an abrupt end, the process itself is seemingly never-ending. The world of condensation above shifts, and is replenished again and again, moving and shrinking and growing like tectonic plates in fast-forward. A cycle of death and rebirth, allowing life everywhere to flourish through its circulation. There is no destination. The swollen, murky brown channels, the warm, peaceful tropical seas—they are not flowing towards

some ultimate goal, a definitive ending-they simply flow and swirl and merge until they become each other then split and diverge once more. No meaning, simply existence.

The harsh, devastating downpour ends eventually, and the water cast down from the heavens moves on to the next stage in its existence. How similar to life. Stages of a human life must end, whether we yearn for them to, like a painful hailstorm pummeling us with violent wounds while we stumble around helplessly for somewhere to take refuge, or wish they could continue forever, like a stream gracefully weaving its way through the idyllic meadows. The stream must end, as it swirls and mixes with the salty, bitter waters of the ocean-everything ends eventually.

Human life has an end but no definitive meaning, like the rains will stop, but have no goal. One day, the bright light that comforts the wounded landscape by gently repairing the damage done after a senseless attack of precipitation will become too powerful-and the rains shall fall no more. Just a scorching, inhospitable desert of burnt and parched lands, long forgotten by the deceased creatures that once hid while raindrops thundered upon every surface in sight. Merely a dead sphere of rock, soon to be obliterated by the huge ball of nuclear fusion that made it possible for it to be anything apart from that in the first place.

In the far future, life will cease forever. Everything will end, no creatures, no water, no planets. Just an endless void of nothingness. It will become impossible for the rain to fall-there will be nothing to fall on. Because however long something seems to go on for, it will end. The storm of thrashing winds and devastating downpours will stop eventually, just as surely as a human life. Nothing is forever. The cycle of rain and river and sea may seem infinite, but this is an illusion. An illusion of eternity created by the vastness of the future compared to our own insignificant lifespans. Is it not strangely both comforting and terrifying to know that the grandest structures and processes in this world are as surely doomed by mortality as we are?

Beams of blinding light blast through the canopy to warm the soft, spongy carpet of leaf litter and pine needles laid unevenly around pillars of strong, age-old wood. Bright green leaves glow in the striking gaze of the sun above, highlighting the miniature streams spread in a wonderfully natural pattern over them. Diminutive saplings poke their determined fingers through the flooring, grasping for the life-giving illumination above, always fighting to reach higher,

and replace one of the ancient giants that create vast caverns of leaves and living architecture. Countless creatures scurry and crawl around and through both the dead remnants and living majesty of immensely vast plants, relying on them for everything they require. Even once the lives of those impressive giants end, they still influence everything. Even when the rains have stopped, their journeys still carry on through the waterways enclosed in green foliage, and continue through intricate networks of underground canals, hunters and grazers, canals and rivers, lakes, ponds, oceans and clouds.

Even when you stop existing, when you think your last thought and your heart beats for the final time, your journey is not over. The impact of a person lasts far beyond their death; even when the rain stops falling, the river still flows. You may still be thought of daily for years to come (or you may be forgotten within a decade). You have no way of knowing. Maybe the water from the powerful storm will flow swiftly down steep mountainsides and be thrust into the ocean of the forgotten before anything can stop it. Or maybe it will linger in crystalline pools, gradually draining away, taking its time on its inevitable path towards being lost forever. There are thousands of routes that the raindrop could travel on. Countless possibilities for your existence in life, and your legacy in death. How many people will continue the missions of the departed, or carry with them the messages of the deceased?

Finally, the last drop fell onto the scorching, parched ground. It fizzled away within seconds of reaching the frying pan of earth and sand, taking with it any hope that life would persist under the intense gaze of the hellishly colossal star. The unrecognisably burnt remains of countless species littered the ground. After all this time, the storm was over.