

Portraits of Earth

by

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PORTRAITS OF EARTH

We start at the beginning. You don't have to, but I like to see how the styles of the paintings, portraits, and murals evolve and change over the course of generations. The vivid and colorful drawings, the fantastical landscapes, the somber and revealing portraits tell a story. The story of our people and our journey to our new home.

I find peace here in the gallery, and focus. I am so, so proud Libra has a painting here. Not just a painting, but the last painting. The very last. We'll see it soon.

I take Libra's hand in my left and Dagur's in my right and we start the tour, pushing through the milling crowds of thoughtful colonists.

This tour of the gallery wasn't formal. It wasn't planned or put on a calendar. It wasn't part of the official preparations for Settlement. It wasn't on any checklist. But somehow, we are all here. All the colonists have come together in this place, the huge circular hallway running the circumference of the main, round hull.

We've come to pay our respects to those first colonists who first set out from their home so long ago. We've come to see a pictorial history of our epic odyssey. We've come to remember.

The first painting is one of my favorites, so bright and basic, it shows the world through a child's eyes. At least, I imagine it is a child who painting it. It is titled "The Yellow Sun." The bright, primary colors, the disregard for form or convention, the alien foliage is the most verdant green, the skies the most azure blue, the Sun yellow gold. They are the colors of youth and hope, a world painted fondly, captured in sun-dappled color of a child's memory. In the foreground are basic figures of brown and peach,

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

topped with wild gray and black smudges and black dollops for eyes and a smear of mouth. Perhaps grandparents or favored aunts or uncles.

“Who are those people, Mommy? Are they her parents?” Dagur asks, his round, brown eyes shining, eager and inquisitive. He reminds me so much of Delling, it hurts me to look at him sometimes. I worry that I will hurt his feelings, the way I cringe sometimes when I talk to him, the way he makes me cry by the simple things he does and says. I hope he knows it’s not him, it’s me. It’s the raw and painful memories he evokes inside me by the tilt of his head, by the look of his eyes.

“Oh, no honey. Not her parents. She would have come with her parents, I think. They might be a grandparent or relative. Or maybe friends she left behind.”

“That’s sad. I think she missed them. You can tell.”

And you can.

I still marvel at the child who painted this knew these people, saw these things. The child that touched these walls and strolled this corridor knew this world of green trees and blue skies. A child of the world of the yellow Sun. A Sun none of us ever see with our own eyes.

I reach to touch the paint, but stop short, my hands lingering just about the rough surface of ancient flecks of blue and green and yellow. It’s stupid really. It has long been a rule that you aren’t to touch the paintings, to help preserve them, to keep them from fading from our touch or smearing from the oils from our skin. It seems a silly rule now though. This is the last tour. These paintings will never be seen again. This is the last showing of the gallery.

We move onto the next painting.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

This one, like the last, seems painted by a child. The brush strokes are large and daring, the colors are bold and brash. But this picture has a sad, wistful quality. Like the first, this is a landscape, populated with small, carefully drawn figures. The painting is detailed and precise: purple mountains loom in the distance, a blue-green lake in the foreground. It looks like a park of some kind, or some sort of nature reserve. Subdued flowers, pink and red, are spaced evenly around the lake. Individual people with peculiar, specific characteristics, clearly drawn from memory, inhabit the scene. A tall man in a wide-brimmed hat stands next to a woman in a bonnet. They both stand next to a blanket littered with food. A picnic. Next to the lake, a boy and a girl play Earth games. The girl has a rope. The boy has a ball. What appears to be an older man strolls off toward the back of the painting with an animal by his side. The painting is old and faded. Paint flecks have dried and become dust, so it is difficult to tell what sort of animal the small figure is. I guess a dog. Libra guesses a horse. Dagur guesses a dinosaur. Libra and I laugh and tell him, no. He looks hurt but we tell him its ok, he hasn't taken Earth history yet, he is not expected to know that dinosaurs didn't live at the same time as people. As I am laughing, I look again at the picture, at all the meticulous accessories of the residents of this world, the deliberate colors of clothing, the painstaking attention to details of clothing, activity, possession, companion. This was a real place and real people the child knew. This painting isn't for us. It was for her. An attempt to remember a favorite place and loved one's left behind. That thought makes me melancholy and it stops my laugh short. I look down and Libra and squeeze her hand.

“Ready for the next one?”

She nods.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

The third painting is more eclectic than the other two, but still appears drawn in a child's hand and still infused with bright, undiluted color. It is a hodge-podge collection, a child's favorite things. There is a round, pink half circle perched above a brown cone. It looks like a geometry problem except for drips like tears that trickle from it.

"What's that, Mommy?" asks Dagur.

I shake my head. I have no idea. An artifact, a memory, of an old world. Gone and forgotten, at least by us.

Next to the half-circle and cone is another exercise in geometry. Two black circles, divided by four black lined radii connected by a bright red line, with two silver dashes.

"What's that one?" Libra is intrigued, I can tell. I recognize this one and I wonder if a child's fascination with bicycles is something inherent in our genes now, passed down in our DNA from one generation to the next.

"It's called a bicycle. Little girls like you would ride them."

"Ride them? Like our spaceship?"

"Sort of."

"It doesn't look very big."

I smile. It doesn't. It really doesn't. We have grown accustomed to vastness.

Next to the bicycle is another drawing. Like the other two, this one resembles an exercise in geometry, a long rectangular slash, furiously hatch-marked into uneven squares, appended above and perpendicular to a field of green. What looks to me like a bucky ball floats in space over the hatch-marked rectangle. Two figures are drawn, one on each side of the rectangle.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

“That one looks like a science experiment,” says Libra. She does not sound impressed. Science isn’t her favorite subject.

“I wonder what they are studying?” I say, trying to engage her interest. I want her to take more of an interest in the sciences. One day, I will no longer be around, and it will fall to her to take my place as the colony’s biologist. And our new home promises a myriad of alien challenges and a whole world of new discoveries. Biologists will be needed.

“I don’t know, it looks boring though.”

“What does that look like?” I ask, pointing the floating, geodesic dome.

“I dunno,” says Libra, bored. “It looks like a ball to me.”

I laugh. “That’s right! A bucky ball. You know what that is don’t you?”

“Yeah, yeah. Of course. A carbon molecule. Boring.” She shakes her golden head. Libra wonders aloud why the Earth child would be so fascinated by bucky balls. I tell her it’s because the children of Earth were very smart and loved science. That’s how they achieved the knowledge to design the *Bonfils*. Libra sniffs in dubious disbelief and rolls her eyes.

We move on.

The last painting on this section of the hull is a drab, melancholy affair, blues and grays.

“Oooh, I don’t like this one,” says Libra, wrinkling her nose.

Sad faced figures stand under clouds of ash, broad, impossibly large tear drops dot their faces. Like the first two, this one is a landscape, populated with people, and,

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

like all three, we see our old home through a child's eyes. This is one of the saddest paintings, and that is saying something. It is a long gallery.

The yellow sun is hidden by chaotic swaths of gray and primary black as if obscured by the march of time and the haze of fading memory. The residents of this painting peek out under somber skies. It's a child imagining the sorrow of the friends and family left behind, missing him. Hoping they miss him. How sad they must be that he is gone. So he imagined. I am sure they were.

The first days, first years, were hard, according to the Ship's records. The original colonists, who set off from Earth on this epic journey were enthusiastic, adventurous spirits. They had to be to be willing to undertake such a commitment, to give their lives and their children's lives to the mission. The darkness gets to you. Humans, whether through countless iteration of genetic evolution or by the hand of an Almighty, weren't designed for a life in space, a life without natural sunshine or the feel of real earth under our feet. It took us time to adapt. For the first generations, the adaptation did not come easily. One out of ten of the colonists children committed suicide those first years.

I lead Libra past a stairwell that leads down to the connecting strut and observation deck. In the distances, the great curve of the gallery curls, a centrifugal horizon that disappears in a long arc ahead of us.

The gallery started, so the story goes, as an accident, mischief by one of the young colonists with too much time on her hands and memories of home that longed to be put into form and substance. The Captain was initially angry at the vandalism of his ship and he ordered the painting scrubbed away. The colonists and crew, however, were

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

of a different mind and found the painting a welcome and comforting reminder of home. As more and more of the children started to paint on the wall of the hull, the adults, too found that there was something about the act of painting, about choosing and mixing colors, about the tactile quality of setting hand to brush, brush to paint, paint to wall that was emotionally cathartic in a way the realistic but somehow soul-less virtual vids could never be.

The Captain, facing a near mutiny, relented and allowed the paintings to stay. They say his rationale was that it was good for morale, that the colonists needed a creative outlet, a healthy way to express their feelings of homesickness and trepidation on such a long voyage and smearing paint on parts of the hull seemed a harmless enough way for the restless colonists to vent their feelings and fears.

And the gallery was started.

We move to the next section of the gallery, further down the hall. Here, the paintings while younger, are still, very, very old, faded with time, their paints worn down by the steady flow of air slowly eroding the surface paint, molecule by molecule.

The paintings here are more sophisticated, more deliberate, but also more self-conscious somehow and, in many ways, less insightful, less revealing. These were clearly done by adults. The painting is exemplary, the technique impeccable, the lines are fine and steady, not drawn by the restless, haphazard hands of youth.

However, like the earlier paintings, these seem to reflect the longing and the regret of those brave early colonists. They are paintings of the places and people and things they cherished most and missed most of Old Earth.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

The first painting in this section shows a tall city, with proud towers rising above quaint, tidy houses. The city is perched at the edge of a broad, blue bay, a gray, mist covered coast in the distance, and a great, graceful red bridge connecting the city to the far off misty shore. I think to myself, this painter has skill, but there is something about the painting that is not as revealing as the first. It's as if the painter was more concerned about showing an ability to paint a proper painting, rather than expressing himself.

“What is that, Mommy?” Dagur asks, pointing at the bridge.

“It's called a bridge,” I reply.

“It looks funny.”

“It's how people on Earth crossed the waters, rivers and lakes, so that they did not have to get their feet wet,” says Libra, showing of her knowledge. She recently completed the course on Old Earth history.

“Will we have bridges?” Dagur asks.

I think on this a moment. I hadn't thought about that before. “Yes, yes, I think we'll have bridges.” I smile. Our new home is a watery place with many bays and shallow seas. I think to myself that I may not see a bridge built in my lifetime, but Libra and Dagur might. Yes, they might live to see an actual bridge built on our new world. The thought makes me smile.

The next painting is a portrait of a beautiful, smiling woman. She has long yellow-brown hair and fair skin and dark, expressive eyes, and a broad smile filled with whiter-than-white teeth. Clearly a real person and someone very special to the painter. Someone the painter missed, very, very much. My guess is it's a lover, who, through fate or choice, remained on Earth while her lover left her to travel among the stars, never to

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

return. It is as if the painter is trying to picture her, back on Earth. The painter would have been, by then, impossibly far away, beyond Venus, beyond Mars, the Sun indistinguishable against the backdrop of the myriad glowing stars. He imagined her happy, smiling, healthy. But there is something in the color of her eyes, in the turn of her mouth, like she has a sorrowful secret, like she is hiding something broken behind her broad, white smile. Like she is trying to convince a new lover that she is, indeed, in love with him, that there is no other. But the wished-for cloud in her eyes, the hoped-for quirk in her smile, tell a different story. They tell the painter she is missing him, she remembers him, and she'll love him forever.

“What’s wrong?” asks Libra. I shake my head and blink back tears. I am being silly. I am transferring my own feelings of loss and sorrow onto this portrait.

It’s been hard since Del died.

“Nothing, honey. It’s nothing. Let’s keep going.”

The next portrait has the appearance of a family photo. This one is artfully done, but not quite as if by a professional painter. The proportions are too awkward, the heads too big for the bodies. But there is painstaking detail to the faces.

There is a father there, old and wise, with dark hair, gray at the temples, and kind eyes. Something about the set of his jaw and the tilt of his brow suggests he could be stern.

A dark haired woman is by his side. The mother. She looks matronly and warm-hearted, and there is something about her – you can just tell she loved all her children, unconditionally, forever, even a headstrong daughter who might have defied her parents to go to the stars and leave her home, her family, her mother, forever.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

Then there is a brother who, I imagine, looked just like his missing sister, just with shorter hair and a squarer jaw, and a determined, jealous look in his eyes; he is just sorry that, through accident or circumstance, that he is not able to go on such a magnificent adventure as his fortunate and reckless sister whom he is so much alike.

And last is a little sister, different from the rest, smaller, with gold hair, not brown. A defiant look in her eyes. She always wanted to be like her big sister, to live up to her big sister's reputation, then exceed it. There is a fiery look in her eyes, something that boldly declares "Yeah, you can go off on your stupid spaceship to some far away world, but you just wait and see where I go. Oh, yeah. That's right. You won't. Because you won't be here. Well, your loss. Because I will do fantastic things."

We keep moving down the corridor, the huge rotating, donut shaped tube, spinning on its axis, providing centrifugal gravity. The gravity provided by the rotation is similar to that of Earth's, approximately .8 gs. Enough that we retain some muscle mass, though nowhere near that of our Old Earth cousins, 20 light years away. Most of us spend a good deal of time outside of the spinning rotunda, in the observation decks and galleys below, where there is no artificial gravity. We have an exercise regimen that we're to follow. Many of us do. But not all. We'll pay for our indolence soon.

I wonder what it will be like for us, when we arrive on the surface where the gravity is 1.5 gs, almost twice what we are used to, even when we are in the rotunda with its artificial gravity. We've been cautioned to expect to be sick, weak, to feel frail, to anticipate trouble doing even the simplest, most mundane tasks, cooking, cleaning. Just brushing our teeth is, we are told, could be exhausting. I told Libra that we get down to our new home, she can expect to be heavier, that she will weigh one-and-a-half times

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

what I weigh now. She gave me such a funny look! Her face twisted up in horrified disbelief and she said, with absolute certainty and assurance, that she would never weigh that much. It makes me wonder how heavy she thinks I am!

The Ship's doctors say the children will adapt best, that their young and growing muscles and bones will adjust to the heavy gravity of our new home, maybe within their generation, but certainly with their children's generation. Our race will continue to change, to evolve, again, as we've already changed, over the long years of our voyage.

When we look at the vids and pictures we've received from Earth, the changes are undeniable. We are pale in comparison to our Earth cousins, despite the UV lamps. We are long and skinny, our tendons and ligaments free to stretch and extend as they please, unhindered by the constant exertion of gravity. Our bones and muscles are thin slight in comparison to the images we see of Earthlings. They do not have to support such a heavy burden in the depths of space as on earth.

There are other changes, too, that are more subtle. Our eyes are wider and darker. I imagine it has to do with the low gravity or the long-term effect of living only under artificial light.

I see the changes in the next painting. This one is another in the series, focused on the memories of the people left behind. Like the others in this series, it seems done by an adult. The lines are carefully, meticulously formed, there is great attention to detail, as if the painter thought that by recreating, recapturing every line, every nuance, perhaps she could animate the still figures with her passion and desire, somehow imbuing the subject of her painting with life a life of their own. If she gave them form in her paints, and

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

poured her memories into them, perhaps they would spring alive, and talk to her and give her comfort, keep her company on her long, lonely journey in space.

It is lonely in space. We were one-thousand souls when we left Earth. One thousand of your fellow creatures is not nearly enough company, not for so long a trip.

The painting is a portrait. My guess is it's the artist's parents, an older man and woman. I ask Libra who she thinks they are. She guesses the artist's grandparents. She makes me feel so old sometimes.

But, it's the subject's faces that intrigue me. The attention to detail is so particular I can see the differences between these Earthlings and us, the children of Earth. Their faces are too round, their eyes too oval. It gives them an alien appearance, as if they were a different living on a faraway world. Which, I guess, they are. Or were. These people lived along time ago, I remind myself.

I look down at Libra and try to compare her face to those in the painting. Her eyes are huge and round in comparison, her iris huge and black. Her face is longer, thinner, and paler. It makes me wonder how we'll continue to change.

I wonder if, someday, our children will meet their cousins, the children of Old Earth.

I wonder how different we'll be.

The round, tubular gallery is crowded, filled with the entire population of the *Bonfils*. We have to squeeze by the men, women and children of the ship, squirm through the press of the milling, gawking crowds. We all wanted to come see the gallery this last time.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

We pass the Captain. He nods and smiles at me and tells me how proud I must be that Libra was selected to do the final painting. I smile politely and say “Yes, I am proud.” I can tell the smile does not touch my eyes, but I don’t care. And I can tell he notices, for he smiles again, tersely this time, and says “Pardon, me, I have much to do. We’ll see you on the surface.” I nod and he moves on through the press of the milling crowd.

I haven’t forgiven him. Cannot forgive him.

It is complicated, but not uncommon, the story of the Captain, Del and I. One thousand people may seem like a lot, but when you are in the vastness of empty space, trillions of kilometers away from others of your kind, one thousand can feel like a paltry small number. On such a long and vast journey, rife with so much danger and unpredictability, with only the resources we brought with us at our disposal, it is inevitable that the Ship’s law should pervade every nuance, infiltrate every nook and cranny of our lives. There is virtually no human activity or bodily function that is not regulated by the Ship’s laws and regulations. Including marriage. Including reproduction.

I understand that on Earth, at least in many cultures, and predominant in the cultures of our ancestors, marriage was a fundamental freedom, left to the spirit and desire of the individual. It was considered an inalienable liberty, to choose your own mate, to choose whether or not to have a child.

Not so aboard the *Bonfils*. Our gene pool is too limited, the success of our mission hinges to greatly on preserving genetic diversity among the colonists. The

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

Bonfils geneticists to preserve the integrity of the gene pool and to regulate and guard our population, to ensure it did not grow too fast and outstrip our resources.

This resulted in a number of laws that seemed quite alien to our ancestors, but which seem most natural to us now. At least, most of the time.

We are limited in the number of children we could have, at least in theory. The goal was to preserve our population so each couple was limited to only two children – zero growth, replacement only population. If, for some reason, a couple was infertile or unable to reproduce, then their quota is raffled off to volunteers, amorous couples willing and wanting and able to have more than just two children.

Of course, despite the best innovations in reproductive technology and the best intentions to adhere to the common good, accidents happen even with the best of birth control. And so our population increased over the long march of years, well past one-thousand.

But our freedom wasn't just limited by how many children we could choose to have, it is also limited in whom we could have children with. From a young age, the geneticists would inform the parents of the children with whom their children should be paired based on the imperatives of preserving genetic diversity.

We've known *Libra's* future husband for two years now, a young lad of respectable birth, a little homely and awkward, though we hope he'll grow out of it in puberty.

It is a broken system, to be sure. It has been helpful in stemming dangers from too much in-breeding among our population and, often times, as with *Del* and *I*, the pre-ordained matches work out quite satisfactorily. More than satisfactorily.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

Not every person is satisfied with the matches mandated by the geneticists. Normally, we accommodate this amiably enough. Our mandated marriages are flexible enough to placate the desires, impulses of lust that the geneticists cannot control and it was common for married couples to permit dalliances to satisfy natural human passion, so long as the dalliance did not produce an unauthorized result in an unplanned child, whose genetic makeup did not fit into the geneticists calculations and whose physical functions required resources that exceeded those allotted by the ship Bursar.

Despite the rather liberal limitations on conventional marriage and the flexibility to indulge our passions outside the confines of our obligatory filial and matrimonial duties, sometimes we want more. We are, after all, human.

Such was the case with the Captain and I.

Del had known of the Captain's feelings for me and had said nothing of our trysts. They were matter of fact, and common enough. And Del had plenty of tryst's of his own. We thought nothing of it. I enjoyed my interludes with the Captain, but always returned to Del. Though our marriage was arranged, no two people ever loved each other more. But the periodic love-making was not sufficient for the Captain and he committed a great taboo. He told me he wanted me to leave Del. He wanted to be my husband. I spurned him, not just out of shock, though there was plenty of that, but out of love for Del. I would never have left Del. Would never leave Del.

The Captain was discouraged and resentful. He stewed and became bitter.

Worse still, he took his anger and spite out on Del. Del took it in stride, as he always took everything in stride. Del was First Lieutenant, Lt. Delling Foreveille, like his father before him, and his father before that. His family had always been second to

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

the Captain. Normally, his duties were to oversee the proper administration of the ship and to support the Captain in its governance. But the Captain took out the frustrations of unrequited love on Del, assigning him the most laborious, menial and dangerous tasks on the ship.

Three months ago, days after we'd set the date for Settlement, Del found himself on a long tether, floating above the immense solar sail, trying to repair one of the many holes caused by the impacts of micro-meteors and asteroids. It was a dangerous and pointless task since we were so near to the end of our voyage, the solar sails serving virtually no purpose except to provide an infinitesimal counter thrust, its broad gold sails now pivoted to point to our new red sun to help slow our approach. Their contribution was negligible, most of the counter-propulsion provided by our long-dormant nuclear engines. It was a needless task.

But, out of jealous anger and un-satiated longing, Del found himself tethered, floating in space, three hundred meters from the ship, patch kit in hand, sealing the myriad holes and punctures in the enormous golden solar sails. Such a waste. We still don't know exactly what happened. The Second Lieutenant's best guess is that Del's tether was severed accidentally by a jagged-edged support beam broken during one the asteroid showers that peppered the ship as we entered the heliosphere.

Del flew too far, too fast. Our journey had been long. We'd used up so many of our resources and our refining capabilities were limited. We had enough liquid hydrogen fuel for the shuttle missions required for Settlement. Not enough fuel to attempt a rescue. So the Captain says. But I believe him. I tell myself I believe him.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

They rushed me to the control room, to let me spend the last few hours with Del over the intercom. He told me he loved me. He told me to take care of Libra and Dagur. He told me to get remarried, out of love this time, not obligation. I told him my love for him was never an obligation. That I would always love him. That we would never forget him.

And then his air ran out.

Libra, Dagur and I continue, on and up, and through time, past painting after painting, each mural, each portrait, each landscape another generation's hopes, and dreams and fears. I am fascinated to see the evolution of our art, to see how the styles changed over the years, reflecting our common experiences and fears. The changes are subtle. Each piece seems to borrow a bit of something, a style, a texture, a color, a theme, from the paintings that went before, and then add something new, something distinctive to the individual artist. It's as if the paintings have evolved with us on our journey.

The next gallery is different from the others. It's a definite break in style, form, and substance. If the previous paintings evolved, these are a great leap in evolution. I almost pause to look back, as if looking for a missing link, to see if we missed a gallery somehow.

These paintings are unnerving. Gone are the primary colors and bold lines of youth. Gone are the vivid, deeply missed landscapes and memories of favorite places. Gone are the careful, delicate portraits of long-lost loved ones.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

These paintings are imaginative and chaotic, a jumbling mix of themes and colors. Some of the colors seem new, as if the artist managed to reach into his or her palette and pull out colors that the universe had never seen before and that exist only on this thin hull of cold metal and nowhere else.

They are a wild cacophony of both abstract themes, love, memory, hope, loss, mixed jumbled together with the common, ordinary aspects of our day-to-day life, the ship, the hydroponic gardens, the crystal clear view of the stars, and the galaxies.

The first painting is abstract, blocks and curves of white against a black backdrop. It would be plain, but then there are splashes of color, a rainbow or multi-colored comet of varied hues seems to form a kind of road under the structure of white, which, when you step back and squint out of the corner of your eye, you realize is a representation of our ship.

“I like the colors,” says Libra. I agree. The colors are beautiful. But the ship seems very lonely against the blackness of space. The creator of this painting was among the first generation that never saw Earth, who never felt the brush of grass, or smelled an ocean breeze. His earth was the ship’s white hull. His sky was the view of black space from the view ports of the observation deck.

It makes me glad we are almost home. I count myself very lucky to be among the first generation of colonists to see a world of earth and sky.

The next painting is beautiful, but obtuse at first glance. It is wonderfully complicated and graceful, filled with familiar shapes, but bearing no recognizable form. Complex geometrical patterns and colors intertwine gracefully, drawn in fine lines with a delicate touch. Parabolas, hyperbolas, and ellipses all combine gracefully together,

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

forming a vast but coherent whole. It's a spider web of math and physics. The overall picture is alien, yet there is something reassuringly familiar about its symmetry and order. It's as if the painter were trying to give the form and substance to Mathematics, to reveal the visage of Physics herself, in acrylic and oil.

It makes sense to me that this generation of painter, one of the first in human history to be born without the grace of the yellow sun or the feel of earth or the scent of wind would turn to something more esoteric for inspiration. This generation could not look to the memory of a sunrise. Trapped in a hull of white metal surrounded by a sea of endless, midnight black, they were unbounded, freed from the strictures of earth-bound senses. Their inspiration was their own limitless imagination.

The next part of the gallery is Dagur's least favorite and he pulls at my hand, trying to drag Libra and I through it quickly.

"They're creepy, Mommy. I don't like them," he says, cocking his head carefully back at us, trying to avoid looking at innumerable visages of long-dead ancestors looking back at us from the gallery wall.

The first picture is of a man. He is stern-faced, but with kind eyes and there is something about the look of his face, the set of his jaw, the gleam in his eye, that suggests he was a man who had achieved his life's desire. A boy who'd grown up wanting nothing more or less than the grandest adventure of anyone anywhere, who, as a man, had achieved every last bit of that desire and who, as his life wound its way down and he prepared to embark on his last and greatest adventure, could not imagine finding any more adventure than he had found in his life.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

There is a caption. It reads “Capt. Jonathan Dwight Udry, First Ship’s Captain, b. 2037, d. 2122.”

“You know who that is don’t you?” I ask Dagur and Libra, pointing at the stern-faced man. Libra rolls her eyes in a way that suggests of course she knows. Doesn’t everyone?

“Mmm, the First Captain?” asks Dagur, less sure.

“That’s right.”

“He’s the Captain’s, great-great-great-great-grandfather, huh Mommy?”

“Yes, something like that. I don’t know how many ‘greats’ for sure, but yes, he’s the Captain’s great-great something grandfather.”

“He doesn’t look like the Captain,” says Dagur.

I look at the picture again. No, he doesn’t, I decide. His skin is too pale, his face is too round, his eyes too small. I admire Dagur’s perceptiveness. He would make an excellent biologist. Maybe if Libra rejects the profession I can get dispensation to take Dagur as my apprentice. I am not sure how I feel about him someday taking Del’s place as the Captain’s First Lieutenant anyway.

It’s another facet of our society, this one not a rule, but a custom, a matter of imperative, that each generation should take up his father’s, or mother’s trade. This was not a mandate or a regulation. It’s not a ship’s rule or part of our Charter. I think, in part, it was a matter of parental pride, each parent wanting to see their child follow in their footsteps. But more, I think it was a simple matter of practicality.

Certainly, parents simply, by nature, by our own limited, narrow-minded perspective, though we want the best for our children, though we want them to follow

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

their dreams, or so we say, though we want them to make their own path, secretly we cannot help but delight in seeing them follow in our footsteps, cannot help but share with them our own interests, to talk to them about the things that fascinate us, in the secret hope that they will share that interest and fascination. That they will grow to be like us.

But it was more than that.

That first generation every child born aboard the *Bonfils* wanted to be a pilot. Not a captain, not an engineer, not an officer. A pilot. They had grown up with the stories of our incredible flight from Earth, of the thousands of missions it took to assemble the great colony ship, to supply it, to crew it. The stories of the brave pilots were legend and every child in the first generation seemed to willfully ignore their parents own conceited wish that their child would follow their own footsteps as a botanist, a bursar, a biologist.

And of course, in that first generation, we had little need of pilots. The ship was set sail. What we really needed were maintenance workers. People who could, not pilot the ship, but who could help maintain her varied and complex functions.

It did not start out as an edict. It grew more out of custom by common consensus, or perhaps the impetus of simple practicality. Perhaps, it was just the parents exerting their own selfish will and invoking our mission as an excuse to do what our parents and the parents of all the Earth-born generations had mostly failed to do – to force our children to follow in our footsteps. It was practical. Parents could tutor their own children in their trade, pass on what they had learned. And it guaranteed that the variety and diversity of occupations selected so carefully and deemed so necessary by the Earth space agencies would be preserved on the long journey between stars.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

The professions of the first colonists became hereditary by convention, passed down from generation to generation. Thus, the First Captain, Jonathan Udry, was succeeded by his son, the next Capt. Udry, who was succeeded by his son, who was succeeded by his son, and so on, until our current Captain, Captain Charles Udry, succeeded his father. And so it was that the Captain rose to a position of authority where he could order the love of my life on a dangerous and needless task, resulting in his death, and ripping an endless black void in my heart wider and more unbridgeable than the black gulf of space we just crossed.

“There, there she is Mom!” shouts Libra excitedly. Her shout shocks me out of my reverie and I realized we’ve passed a couple of generations now, while I was lost in thought.

“There she is!” Libra pulls and tugs and my arm, dragging me toward the painted portrait of a gray-haired, straight backed woman.

Like me, the woman has black hair peeping out amidst the gray, but otherwise the resemblance ends there. Like all this generation, her face was too pale and round, her eyes too narrow, her frame too thick with bone and muscle giving her a clumsy, blocky appearance.

The caption at the bottom reads “Leslie Margaret Adams, Ship Biologist, b. 2041, d. 2126.”

“That’s Great-Great-Grandma?” asks Dagur, his wide-round eyes, even wider. He seems scared of her for some reason. Her thick frame is imposing I have to concede.

“Yes,” I reply, I put my hand on Dagur’s shoulders and gently nudge him closer to the wall to get a better look. “That’s your Grandma.”

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

“Great-Great-Grandma right?”

“Something like that. Many greats.”

“She looks mean,” says Dagur.

“Not mean,” corrects Libra. “Tough. You had to be tough to live Old Earth, what with all the wars.” Libra looks for any opportunity to show off her newly acquired knowledge of Old Earth.

Dagur’s big eyes look worried. “Will we have wars on our Earth?”

“No, no baby. We won’t have wars.”

I wonder if that’s true or if our future history will prove me a liar.

The next gallery I find depressing, and sad, and haunting, in part, because I know the history behind the strange and melancholy paintings. They are a marked departure from the art we produced in the generations before or since. All the paintings here share the common themes of isolation, loss, despair.

The first image is quite ugly at first glance. It is a large, fuzzy, ill-defined circle of brown against a muddy black backdrop. Upon closer examination, smudges of white and grey pepper the background and a myriad of smoky details fill the focus of the painting. I know this painting well.

I always joked to Del that, to me, it looked like a Monet of a pile of excrement. He laughed at my poor joke, but I could tell by faraway look in his eyes that he disagreed with me. Del tried to explain to me what he saw in the brush strokes of brown and black. Tried to tell me that he saw something more in the smeared details.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

“Look at the fine lines and deep fissures, the geographic details.” He would say. “And the haunted look of this strange, lonely world. See the features - the deep, black, craters here? The jagged line of broken canyons just below? Now, let your mind roam free, see the world as a whole. See how it resembles a portrait? As if this world were the face of broken-hearted sorrow left alone in the void, companionless, doomed forever to wander the vast reaches of empty space alone.”

I was unconvinced, unable to shake away the ugliness of the portrait and the sad story behind it. And now, as I remember Del’s words, I have even more reason to dislike it. His description of the face of sorrow reminds me too much of myself, left alone, companionless, in the depths of space.

I remember the stories of this world. It is a real world and, according to our history, one of the first great discoveries made by the colonists. It was the first extra-solar planet to be visited by humanity.

It was a strange world encountered at 13 ly into our journey, discovered by accident. The dark, sunless world, un-tethered to any sun, lay in our path, more or less. The orders to the captains of the *Bonfils*, passed down from generation to generation, from Earth were clear. The captains were to make no deviations from its course unless deemed necessary by the Captain to “preserve the lives of the crew, colonists, or other citizens or to ensure the success of the Mission.” The orders stipulated we were to explore, observe and study any space bodies, anomalies or artifacts to the best of the ship’s ability and capacity, but always without endangering the mission.

In this case, the body of interest was off our current trajectory by more than 650 billion kilometers, a diversion that would take us years out of our way. And there was

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

grievous risk. The object that so consumed the interest of the former Captain Udry was a large brown dwarf, a planetar, a failed star, floating free in space, unaccompanied by a star or planets or any other celestial bodies. It was a cold, lonely, dark world.

Humanity had visited the all the worlds of Sol. But we could be the first to visit an extrasolar world.

The prospect of this opportunity for discovery proved irresistible to the Captain and crew. Despite the risk, despite the fact that the exploration of the planetar could be done remotely, albeit not as effectively and certainly not as interestingly, despite his ancient orders from far away Earth, the lure of adventure was too great. The orders permitted the Captain to request permission for such deviations. But, the Captain, in an impassioned argument, made the case that even if permission were requested, it would be twenty-six years before we received their answer.

“We are too long from Earth,” he implored. “We’ve traveled too far. Our orders were written by a people who had never endured the endless journey across the stars who served a government that no longer exists on a planet 122 trillion kilometers away. It is time, long past time, for us to stand on our own, to make our own decisions. We are, after all, to be masters of our own, new world someday.”

Despite his impassioned plea for self determination, I suspect his real motivation was a desire to escape tedium.

In fairness to him, life aboard the *Bonfils* while in transit was a constant, unending, unyielding exercise of the mundane routine of ceaseless maintenance. The ship, itself, was largely automated, our course, our trajectory were set, there was little in the way of excitement or adventure a young Captain might wish for. Our days were

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

filled with the drudgery and constant repetitive tasks that accompanied the maintenance of the greatest mechanical object, both in terms of size and ingenuity, ever crafted by human hands.

The Captain's days and duties, and crew and colonists' for that matter, were filled with the basic, necessary drudgery, the changing of the air filters, the sealing of hulls, the patching of the solar sail, the cleaning of the septic system, the repair of the water and waste recycling processors, the maintenance of the engines. Other than the occasional excitement generated by the happy accident, life aboard the *Bonfils* was undeniably boring.

So I don't judge young Captain Udry too harshly for disregarding ancient directives from Old Earth and seeking a bit of fame, excitement and adventure.

But the brown dwarf, proved a deadly diversion.

It's official name, according to our astronomer's logs, was HD 656921. We named it Hoenir after an ancient Earth deity in keeping with Earth convention. Hoenir was the silent god in the mythology of the culture from which we borrowed the name, and we thought it an apt name for this dark, lonely world.

Hoenir proved to be treacherous as well as solitary.

It took the *Bonfils* years to transit off course to pay visit to Hoenir. As we approached, we realized Hoenir was not as alone as we thought. Around Hoenir swirled a vast maelstrom of dark and hidden debris of gas, dust and rock that our cameras and telescopes and instruments failed to perceive in the dark, un-illuminated depths of empty space, light years from the nearest star and source of illumination. We didn't realize

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

Hoenir's treachery until the first piercing blows of meteor and asteroid perforated the hull.

Such impacts were common enough in space and an integral part of routine ship maintenance. But, in near empty space, these impacts are few and far between. Not so as we neared Hoenir. The gravity of the failed brown dwarf had sucked in a cloud of dust and debris from neighboring space. Much of this debris fell onto Hoenir, ultimately captured by his immense gravity. Without a gas giant like Jupiter to shield Hoenir from the impact, Hoenir had borne the brunt of the assault and the scars of impacts were evident in the craters and broken fissures that marred the brown dwarf's surface. But there was still a vast cloud of dust and rock orbiting the planetar, waiting to pepper and bombard the Hoenir for millennia to come. And it was in this cloud of churning dust and rock that we found ourselves caught.

The *Bonfils* is a fine ship, well designed to withstand such a long and perilous voyage, a feat of engineering. And her crew was well-trained, used to the rigors and requirements of life in space, almost by instinct, knowledge of how to move in 0g, how to repair a broken fuel filter, how to patch a puncture in the hull were all almost second nature to captain, crew, and colonist alike. But we were not prepared for such a storm of stone.

The ship was riddled by a spray of rock and debris that ripped through sail and hull, tearing through it as if it were nothing more than a cloud of gas or ether in a vacuum. Micro-meteors and asteroids peppered the hull, breaking the ship, sluicing through it until it was more hole than hull.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

The story goes, as it is passed onto us from the recordings left by the survivors, that they could see distant, shadowy Hoenir through the gashes in the ships hull. Clinging to rebar or banisters, while the gales atmosphere were sucked out through gouges in the hull, the survivors say they could see with their own, naked, terrified eyes, the huge, lonely, shadow of the brown dwarf we named Hoenir, huge and brown, amidst a fast swirling sea of gas and rock and stone it had collected in its gravity well.

I wonder whether that is factual or more the product of exaggerated memory of the survivors, but it was our first claim to fame, that we were the first humans to visit an extrasolar world and it has become almost taboo to question the recollection of the survivors of that fateful and costly expedition.

It cost us almost a decade of Earth years due to distance and repairs. But time was the least of the price we paid. Almost seven hundred souls, colonist and crew perished in the perilous thirty-six hours we spent in the asteroid belt around Hoenir. Almost half our already paltry numbers.

The Captain immediately ordered the ship turned.

But the *Bonfils* was propelled by nuclear engines at a fantastic velocity. She is not easily nor quickly turned. To make matters worse, the Ship's engines were badly damaged and the long causeway that connected the bulk of the Ship to the engine modules, which were purposefully designed to hang from the back of the ship by many hundreds of meters in the event of an accident, was also perforated, its atmosphere escaping explosively from the ruptures.

We had no way to repair the engines, no way to get to them, no way to turn them off, no way to redirect the ship. We were plunging, headlong, into a vast, violent storm

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

of spinning rock at a velocity exceeding the detonation velocity of exploding ammonium nitrate. The vast disk of orbiting dust and debris stretched across a quickly spinning plane almost 200 million kilometers wide.

The *Bonfils* would have survived to see only the first 20 million kilometers of the violent maelstrom, but for the sacrifice of one man.

“Why do you look so sad, Momma?” asks Libra shocking me out of my reverie. I wipe my eyes. I should tell them the story, I realize. They deserve to know.

“I was just remembering the story behind this painting,” I say. “You know, this is a real world,” nodding at the painting. “And your ancestor’s saw it with their very own eyes. We visited that world, long ago. It’s a giant, sunless world, with a huge and hidden asteroid encircling it. The *Bonfils* was badly damaged by the rock and dust as she approach and would have been destroyed. But your great-grandfather saved us all. He climbed through the engine room causeway, even though it was half-destroyed and venting air into the vacuum of space. He helped repair the engines so we could turn around and escape. If it wasn’t for your great grandfather, none of us would be here.”

Dagur’s eyes grow into huge, inquisitive lenses. Ever since the setting of the date for Settlement, he’s been agog about anything having to do with alien words, alien planets. I wonder again at his curious nature and thing for the second time this day how much more of an aptitude he has for the sciences than command. I must speak with the Captain. Exceptions must be allowed to our rigid rules and customs, especially where the ships welfare is at stake. We’ve made them in the past. And, soon, we’ll have more need for xeno-biologists than second lieutenants. Perhaps, the Captain will listen. He owes me.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

“What happened to him?” Dagur asks.

It takes me a second to realize he his talking about his great-grandfather. “He died honey. He died trying to save us all.” I see Dagur’s round eyes widen further and I can see his chest puff out in pride. It’s good for him to know that it’s not just his father who was brave, that bravery, and courage, and self-sacrifice, and selflessness run far back in his genes. I have second thoughts about Dagur as a biologist. Maybe he should be Captain instead. Our settlement of a new world seems a good time to break convention, to start new traditions, perhaps including abandoning our custom of hereditary titles and trades.

The next painting is similar in style to the somber message of hidden danger in “Hoenil”. It is fuzzy, as if seen through tears or distance-blurred. At first, it is unclear what it is a painting of, it seems a smeared mix of somber, sullen hues and colors. But, if you let your eyes wander and become unfocused, somehow the details hidden in the grays and blues reveal. Dark, lonely figures populate the landscape. The painting is richly populated with people standing in solitary poses, but unlike earlier paintings where the resident of the painting seem to be engaging each other, most of the residents of this painting seem isolated, alone, with no one near them. It is as if they are separated from the vibrant, living world by a thick haze, perhaps a storm, but it always seemed to me more likely that the artist was trying to convey space. The dark and lonely people in the painting was us, the colonists of the *Bonfils*, separate by an immense gulf of almost unbridgeable time and space from a connection to our kind. Though I also think the artist, perhaps unintentionally, portrayed his fugue of despair and depression.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

The paintings on this section of the hull all seem to share this theme. They were done in the same era, a dark and depressing time aboard the *Bonfils*, according to our history and the ship logs.

We'd been long from Earth, so long, in fact, that many aboard the ship knew little about the home planet with the yellow sun. We'd created our own culture, our own traditions, but our inspiration waned.

The first generations lived for the communiqués, the video streams, and data sent from Earth. Earth Command would send all the latest news and entertainment, beaming at the speed of light across the emptiness of space. The first generations lived for the transmissions, at first to catch up on everything they had missed, the sports scores, the music, the movies, the current events and the outcomes of wars and elections, then to learn about all the things, the sports, the music, the movies that their parents talked endlessly about.

But the *Bonfils* continued to pull away and, as the distance grew, so grew the interval between communications.

By the time of the painting of "Hoenil" and "Standing Alone in Blue Together", the art and culture and politics of Earth were distant memories, something taught in Earth History class, a rather dull class all the students railed against as pointless, irrelevant and futile, but that was required to be taught by our Colony Charter.

"We'll never see the world with the yellow sun," they say.

"What good is it learning about Old Earth? All this stuff's 20 years old already!"

"We have our own new world, we'll never even ever see an Earthling!"

And so the arguments went.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

But we still teach it, Earth History, regardless. Perhaps it's out of a sense of obligation, respect for the Charter that gave us the right to colonize our new home. Perhaps it's out of a sense of respect for our forebears. Perhaps it's because, on some level, we feel an basic animal need to stay connected to the rest of our kind.

But that generation, the generation that gave us these somber paintings were tired of the comparisons to an old world they, nor their parents, nor their parents had ever seen and they shunned the virtuals and the vids of old earth. But they longed for something new to fill the void, to slake their thirst for meaning and purpose, their desire for adventure aboard a ship where adventure had been regulated and routined into near-impossibility. They longed to connect to their long-lost cousins, to feel some connection to the rest of their kind, and they despised themselves for wanting it.

We continue around the outer corridor, the circumference of the ship's living quarters, past the rec center, the video rooms, the meeting hall, past the play-care, and the school rooms. They are a wild, roiled, cacophony of strange colors mixed with haunting and esoteric images. The painters here have no memories of Earth. No one who did these paintings was alive who even remembered someone who remembered someone who was originally from Earth. The painters' techniques, colors, materials all seem to scream that they are a new generation, broken from the old, ready to carve out their own creative legacy, to break with the conventions and customs of their now, very distant cousins.

Of course, they are Dagur's favorites and he insists we spend the most time here.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

I don't object. These paintings are brash, at times offensive, and always unusual. There is something heartening here as well, something in the strange textures and myriad paints, in the confusing styles that suggest an unbroken spirit and wild individualism that is a marked contrast to the somber fatalism and despair of the previous gallery.

One of the first is a riot of undulating bright color, not so much a painting, but a sculpture. I don't recall this painting and wonder at it – its rare to have such a frivolous use of material; almost everything is recycled, whether plastic to be reconstituted to new purposes or human waste for farming, every last gram of every last solid, liquid, fluid and gas. Even toys were recycled. Dagur had a toy space-craft, a model of an Old Earth rocket ship that had belonged to the original Colonist, his ancient forebear. The shuttle was metal and was once painted white with brightly colored symbols and flags on the wings and hull of nations and entities that had long since ceased to exist, globes and laurels, stars and eagles. But the paint had been worn away to flecks by tiny excited hands and even the metal had been rubbed away, the ship's wings rounded to metal nubs, the details smoothed by generations of eager Foreveille hands, anxious to try their hand at piloting a real rocket ship, knowing, one day, they'd be second-in-command of the *Bonfils*.

“What is that, Mommy?” asks Dagur, touching the painting.

“Don't touch,” I scold. He knows better.

But he doesn't move his hand.

I squint closer at the painting. From a distance, it looked almost pixilated. As I draw closer, I can make out the details.

“It's a tooth,” I tell him.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

He quickly jerks his hand away.

The sculpture painting is composed of a myriad of things, and I marvel at the resourcefulness of the artist. It's a collage of sundry things, too small or too personal to be governed by our voluminous rules on recycling - baby teeth, discarded toys, nubs of wire too small to be reused, and donated bits of personal jewelry.

The recycling regulations govern everything from feces to nuclear rods, spit-water to agricultural waste. However, I could not recall any rule or regulation on baby teeth. It was, I am sure, just an oversight. Perhaps the techno-bureaucrats who drafted the Charter did not have time to have children of their own and were too mired in the minutiae of plans for the Mission to remember they had once been children themselves. Had they remembered that, in fact, children shed baby teeth, I am sure they would have studied it, found some use or purpose for the enamel, and promulgated a rule for baby tooth retention and recycling.

The sculpture is a soldered collage of round-eyed, smiling children of the *Bonfils*. It is remarkable, the change in their faces. They look much more like Dagur and Libra than the children and of the first paintings, even rendered in bits of jewelry, toys and teeth. Their eyes are huge saucers, their faces and limbs long and lanky. They have a gangly look to them that is far more familiar to me than the alien-looking, squat, round-faced children of earth.

There is something encouraging in the painting, a spirit of defiance in the pixilated eyes. There is something that says that they've accepted their destiny as star-wanderers who are born, live and die in space. Something that suggests that they long no more for the world of the yellow sun, blue skies, and green fields to keep them warm, to

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

cheer their heart, or make them feel at home. There is something in their eyes that suggests they no longer need Earth and are just as glad for it.

We move on through the wild and defiant, creative and chaotic paintings of this era, anxious to get to the next gallery. The last gallery.

There is something familiar about the paintings here, they are bold, and vibrant like the paintings we just left. There is something hopeful here as well. They bear a resemblance the paintings in the earlier galleries. I find comfort and encouragement that, after so many generations, so many years, so many challenges, our children might still have something in common with their the very first children. The children who knew Earth.

Many of these are done by children. There is a return to the landscapes and portraits of the first two galleries. These are pictures of a world of earth and sky and water, populated by happy, hopeful people and filled with a myriad of incredible wonders, stunning vistas and simple pleasures. These are painting of hope and home.

Our home.

These are the paintings of the last generation to be born aboard the *Bonfils*.

The first painting is beautiful and wistful. A solitary figure of a little girl in a white dress stands at the edge of a vast wine-colored sea under a pomegranate sky. An immense, engorged sun sits low on the horizon in a perpetual sunset of nectarine. It is windy here, the girl's hair whips and whirls about her, her dress billows like clouds around her legs. In the distance ice flows, tinged pink by the huge red sun, float and bob on low sea swells the color of wine.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

There is something hopeful here, and alien. The painting is familiar, both in technique and style. It's a landscape that hearkens back to the first paintings of the Colonists who painted their distant home. The difference is, those were paintings of memory and longing. This is a painting of the future, of hope and home. The colors are vivid, and alien. It is a world of garnet and ruby. This is the world of the orange sun, purple sky, and red sea. Our world.

The paintings here all reflect this hope, this fascination with the alien-ness, the mystery of our new home.

I can tell you the date and time this era started. It started with an announcement over the intercom by the current Captain Udry's grandfather. I was nine Earth years old.

The predictable and pedantic routine of our lives was suddenly infused with new urgency and excitement. My study of biology took on new urgency and vibrance knowing I might one day have the opportunity to apply my studies to our new home, an alien world.

Our astronomers turned the instruments and telescopes to our new home to ferret out any mystery from the shadows of the faraway planet. Soon, we had details galore of our wondrous new home and new inspiration for our art.

In all the paintings, one image features prominently. And, rightly so as it will be one of the constants of our new world and will inform every aspect of our lives in the same way the natural rhythms of the yellow sun and pale moon did for Old Earth – the huge, sullen, glowing ember of our vast red sun, always low on the horizon.

Our's is a strange new world, very different from the world of our ancestors.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

Tidally fixed, one side of our new world forever faces the huge red sun. Our world does not rotate on its axis so we have no changing of day to night. It is as if time itself is frozen. On one side of our world, it is forever day. The other, forever night. On the day-lit side of our world, the heat is blistering and the scorching red sun is a danger; our world has no magnetosphere to protect it from the blasts of violent radiation that erupt from our new sun and the day-lit world is a vast sun-baked desert, riddled with long canyons and strange rock features, pummeled by constant sun and showered in radiation. It's an unforgiving and dangerous landscape, this vast desert.

The other side of the world is shrouded in shadow. It is a cold place, frozen in perpetual night, covered by a vast glacier that contains most of our new home's water. A vast ice sheet, or, rather, layers of ice sheets, piled, one upon the other, year after year, century after century, until they brush the outer edges of the atmosphere – quite an achievement given our new homes immense gravity which tends to pull everything down, the glaciers, the mountains, giving most of the world a flat, muted look, where our mountains are low, undulating hills, and our seas, roil lowly.

It sounds like a foreboding place, inhospitable to life; but in the middle, where blazing day meets frozen night, is a twilight land. A vast equator, running north to south, where vast frozen glaciers meet the warm, sun-whipped winds and melt, forming vast, cool seas churned by the constant storms fueled by the clash of eternal summer and forever winter.

This stormy twilight is our new home.

Next is another vivid landscape. But this one is a portrait of a living world. The title of the painting is “Twilight World” and it portrays the vast purple plains of regolith

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

we will soon call our home. Again, omnipresent, in the distance is the huge disc of sun, like an immense ember, forever smoldering on the horizon. But what makes this painting different are the details.

“Ew,” says Dagur. “What’s that?”

I look to see him pointing at a ash-colored smudge on the purple plains of the portrait. I look closer and am shocked to recognize finely detailed, smoky fungi in the foreground, populating the crevices formed by the shadows of chalky, purple rocks in the twilight. The fungi is based on my work, from our observations of the planet.

“That’s a kind of plant that grows on the surface.”

“It looks yucky! Is there going to be corn? I like corn.”

“I don’t know, Dag. Maybe. If we can get it to grow.”

“I hope so. We won’t have to eat that stuff we’ll we?”

“No, not if you don’t want to. Besides, we don’t even know if it’s edible yet. It could be toxic or poisonous.”

“It looks poisonous,” he says. He has a hopeful look as he says this. He knows, as do we all, we’ll have to eat whatever we can get to grow.

As we drew closer to our new home, we began to discern details with our ship’s instruments. The original colonists knew some about our new home, even before the mission started. At least enough to make the mission viable. We knew it was a huge, rocky world. We knew it had liquid water, or at least we had evidence of water. We knew it had temperatures that would sustain life. We knew from the planet’s transmission spectrum that it had an atmosphere.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

But, there was so much we did not know. There is no doubt all our ancestors were gamblers. Or suicidal.

We didn't know if the planet harbored life. We didn't know if the atmosphere was breathable or poisonous. We didn't know if the radiation from the red dwarf star would irradiate the entire planet, baking in a microwave of radiation that would cook any life. Including us.

But as we grew closer, and as the telescopic technology of our distant Earth cousins evolved, we learned more and more about our new home.

From our own readings, we were able to determine there was oxygen in the atmosphere, as well as methane and potassium, gases that led us to believe there may be life on the surface.

At about 14 ly, we received a transmission from Earth's Moon. The Daedalus Telescope sent us data from the newly constructed liquid telescope on the far side of the Moon. The telescope with a hundreds-meter wide liquid lens provided amazing surface detail of our new home. It confirmed the presence of water. It confirmed the presence of life.

The first images sent from the Daedalus gave us the first glimpses of our new home. The vast and stormy world-ringing seas, the peculiar and exotic rock formations on the day-lit side, the kilometers-high glaciers on the dark side.

The details, so clear, so distinct, a hundred times more sensitive than the images and pictures available to the original colonists, even revealed strange details, such as the vast, undulating, fields of heliotrope and ash that resembled nothing so much as purple mold growing on gray bread.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

We speculated, what sort of life may have taken hold in this strange new world. It was our theory, mine and the other xeno biologists aboard the *Bonfils*, that the fields are a type of fungi, evolved to grow in low light and suckle nourishment from the chalky, ash colored regolith.

The planet is clearly alive, with oceans and seas and weather systems. And even though it doesn't rotate on its axis and has no magnetic field, it is geologically alive, too. Two massive planets orbit closely to our new home, one closer to the sun, the other farther out. Daedalus found evidence of geologic activity caused by the gravitational tug-of-war between these two, huge heavenly bodies. And our new home has not one, but two, huge moons that add to the stress and plying of the planet, flexing its bedrock into magma that percolates under the surface, creating volcanic activity that spews smoke and sulfur, pulverized rock and pumice into the violet skies and burgundy seas.

Smoke colored foliage grows thickly on the shores of the twilight seas, thick and stringy strands, they seem to grow in the shallows and protected bays where the winds and currents don't rip and rend so fiercely. We speculate this is a kind of seaweed that feeds off the sulfur rich seas, relying on the rich nutrients churned by the glacial grinding and underwater volcanic vents for energy, rather than dim red sunlight from the twilit star for photosynthesis.

There are imagined people, populating the landscape painting. Tiny, distinct, long-limbed people with pale skin and eyes, huge and round and sparkling with excitement for the future fill the plains. Some are tilling the chalky purple soil, some are swimming in a plum colored bay where the smoky strands of seaweed grow. Some are building tiny, sturdy structures of white metal and native purple stone.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

“It’s pretty, Momma,” says Libra.

“Yes, yes it is,” I agreed. And it is.

“Ok, come on,” she pulls at my hand. “Come on! Mine’s just over there!” She is anxious to show Dagur and I her painting, to have us approve. She is proud. She should be.

We started to run out of space on the wall. It was clear some years ago, there would not be room for many more paintings. The colonists had a meeting and decided to save the last space on the hull for the last painting. It would be a place of honor. It would be reserved, appropriately, to one of the Ship’s children and there would be a contest in the schools, all the primary and secondary grades could compete. A panel was appointed to judge the entries. The winner would be given a place of honor, the last space on the wall. The final berth for the last painting in our grand gallery.

Only a short distance away, past the bulwark I see the stairs leading down to the observation deck below and the painting, the first painting, “The Yellow Sun.”

And here, at the very last meters of the wall before the bulwark, is Libra’s painting.

It is very much like the very first painting in the first gallery. It is done in a child’s hand, but carefully, the lines do not waiver too much, the strokes are big and bold. There is no hesitancy. No reservation. There are no subtleties here. The colors are bright and clean. There are no shadows, only hope. But, unlike the “The Yellow Sun” the landscape is alien. The sun is red, not yellow. The sky is purple, not blue. The fields and plains are gray, not green. The sea is pink. Happy looking, not-quite stick

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

figures standing at the shore of a pink sea. Four figures. One tall with strokes of gold hair and unrealistically large breasts. I blush. It is foolish I know.

Next to me is another figure, with big, blue orbs for eyes and shorter hair, still gold. Then is a smaller figure still, with a shock of unruly brown hair and huge brown eyes and a mischievous grin splitting his long face. And the last figure, this one much like the boy, but taller and lanky. with dark hair and a square jaw (so handsome I remember) and huge, round brown eyes, eyes that used to smolder and set me on fire.

“Don’t you like it, Momma?” Libra asks worriedly. I realize I am crying.

I wipe my eyes and hug her.

“Yes, yes, of course I love it.”

Libra beams.

It is a fitting painting, so full of youth and hope and honesty. So much like the very first painting by the very first girl so many generations ago. Maybe Libra’s distant grandmother.

It’s a fitting end, and beginning, to our story.

A soft chime echoes down the hall from the intercom. I realize we are alone in the gallery. A soft voice reminds us that the shuttles are leaving for the surface.

“Ready?” I ask.

Libra smiles. Dagur nods enthusiastically.

We are ready.

After so many years, so many generations. We are ready.

I wonder about the gallery. The Captain says it is not feasible to dismantle it as its part of the outer shell of the ship. The *Bonfils* will stay in orbit for some time, but,

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

eventually, she'll be decommissioned and allowed to burn up in the thick atmosphere of our new home.

Still images and vids have been taken of the gallery, voluminous, high resolution pictures. One day, they will hang in the first museum . But never these original paintings. Other than the crew that remains behind to man the *Bonfils* till her inevitable cremation, this is the last time human eyes will see them.

I take Dagur and Libra's hands and we walk down the stairs to get the last of our belongings and make our way to the shuttle docks, to board the ancient shuttles that will take us to the surface of our new home. I wonder what the adventures, what new discoveries await us.

I look back over my shoulder and the long gallery, the faces and pictures of our hopes and fears, the images of Old Earth and the portraits of our new home.

I wonder what the future will hold for us on the strange surface. I wonder how our new World will change us, and us it. I wonder how we will adapt to this strange world where there is no changing of day and night, where the atmosphere is thick and the skies are purple.

Will this big, heavy world weigh on us, or will we grow stronger?

I am scared, but I am ready to face this strange new world and I wonder how this world will shape and change us, the way our long voyage already has.

We no longer resemble our distant cousins. Our faces have changed. And we'll change even more, I suspect, once we get to the surface. I wonder what Libra and Dagur's grand-children will look like, in our heavy, twilight world.

PORTRAITS OF EARTH

But though some things change, the color of our sky, the shade of our skin, the shape of our eyes, the measure of our calendars, the inspiration for our art, the more important things, I am certain, will remain constant.

For though our faces change, our hearts will not.

We are the children of Earth.

And we remember.