

Planet Poem

"I slipped away," the interrogator looked stern.

"You mean you stole a ship and travelled to an unknown planet, for personal reasons," he corrected.

"And returned before my disappearance was even noted," I countered.

He had the monobrow. He had the monomind. He would never understand me, how I was motivated. He had the ham fists. Not since the neanderthals had the human gene line split into such disparate entities. I hadn't been around a man of this species for decades...This was going to be hell.

"My cross," she said and leapt to my rescue. My attorney had my heart, which didn't help. I fall in love with all women. It's like a rule with me...

"Could you tell the court a little about your background?" she asked.

"Went to art school," I said. "Nothing special...I studied the 20th century artist Christo."

"Wasn't he known for his earthworks? Sculptures that stretched for miles across earth?" she said.

"Ya, I suppose that's where I got the idea for the Planet Poem." I mumbled.

"OK, let's backtrack a little. What do you mean by the Planet Poem?" she asked.

"Xax 3, is really just a large asteroid... hardly a planet, but it has no wind. Not enough atmosphere...I got the idea that if I wrote a poem in the dust there, it would still be readable centuries later..." I divulged.

"So like Cristo, you set out to make some harmless planetary scale art," she concluded..

The beady eyed counselor jumped in: "I get the feeling you're trying to justify theft, absenteeism, and lying, under the heading of art," he protested.

...and that's when I knew I was living in the future. This was a time when over 50% of people followed the holy fire of their muse for their life's work. Weirdly the ham fist, beady eyed lawyer was a noted painter in the impressionist style.

"You think I don't believe you, that I don't understand. No I get you, but I will still judge you, " he offered.

"Meritocracy," I said.

"You guessed it. You can go out on a limb, but only if the work is worth it. We aren't running a society where people can paint a mural on a library whenever they want. We're running a society where 9 out of 10 people who'd try such a crazy thing are sent away... "

"But the one in ten who can make it work?" said my counselor.

"They're the sacred," the man answered. "They're the goal."

The courtroom erupted in a weird chant...

"DEMO DEMO DEMO DEMO"

And so that was it. I would show the pictures I'd taken with my cellphone of the writing, and if the court was pleased with my words, I was sacred, if not I was ostracized.

My lawyer wished me luck as I walked to the overhead. A lot of thoughts rushed through my head, ways I could alter the writing in realtime to make it work better for this crowd...then I surrendered. It is what it is.

Travelers, arriving from distant lands, may come upon these etchings, and wonder about their origins. This dust was scratched by one Ethan Mondragon, youthful wanderer in a year you may not remember. It was a time when all young people had to do a year's service with the terraforming troops. Before the worlds all blossomed in green, before the time of plenty. When we still lived with strict limitations.. on oxygen, on water, on our dreams.

But dreams have a way of getting free. Spreading like a fire in atmosphere. While most dreams are written in green, a new O2 shunt for a struggling world, this one is made of dust. It's the dream of a planet that is a poem...a world that is a message.

You are receiving my dream in your walk. And like the nation of farmers that plants seeds of hope, these words should grow into something new. Something not predicted by examining the seed... You are their host.

So carrying the virus of this world with you you must leave here. But what will you have learned? How does this place change you?

(There is nothing else written in this area, the next shot is on the other side of some small mountains we can see on the horizon)

In this place there are phrases spread about in random patterns.

"This is a rose," says one...

"This is a Wildebeest" says another.

"A rainy morning, with clean fresh air"

"A windy mountaintop, with wildflowers and a scree"

"The surf at Makaha.."

"A giant Kaori tree from north of Aukland"

"A million daffodills growing by the roadside in Holland"

"A Komodo Dragon"

I walk behind another hill in my photographs...

It's not like I miss it. I wasn't even born there. I think I put these memories here because they need a place to live. True, we don't even know what became of earth. We are descendants of the escapists who watched so much of it crumble that it was time to leave. Blasting off with untested hardware, with no means to phone home, we have survived. My grandparents, and their parents before them built a future for us out of nothing. We are lucky, happy, and alive. Only the memories of things I will never see haunt me. To roll in the dirt, dive in the water. sail on the oceans...

And so I scratch these words into my new world. "This is a meerkat" in a strange hope that somehow the universe will remember. And in remembering the words of the planetary poem perhaps we will remember the true poetry we have lost forever....

"Hmm,' says the interrogator , "That it?"

"No, I covered over 300 kilometers with my text," I answered.

"But that was kind of an executive summary?" he asked.

"Kind of yeah, I tried to boil it down," I answered.

"So you walked all over the planet putting the names of things you wished exist?" he asked.

"Some of these items aren't even in the textbooks anymore," I said..

"And you think that's wrong? "

"I think that a lot of stories are just ways to remember... " I suggested..

"So you're trying to create a kind of historical monument...a planet that has a place for all the things that we no longer can accommodate. "

"I think the groupthink is that remembering such things is just unproductive...that we shouldn't sentimentalize the past," I protested.

"Better forgotten," he added. "over-specialized species that couldn't adapt to the changing world."

My lawyer jumped in.

"Do you think it's harmful to bring up these things we can never have again?"

"I think that beauty is the only thing worth remembering, " I answered softly

"pfft you are a recipe for a generation of whiners..." said beady eyes.

"No, in fact I think it will take strength and courage for people to acknowledge the things we don't have, love them, and move on..." I disagreed.

"That's why you built your planet poem...to give the memories a place," said my lawyer.

The crowd was silent. Even old ham fists just looked at me with puzzlement.

"For remembering the things we forgot, and showing us we'll have to be brave to look back, I commend you. You're off the hook."

A cheer came from the crowd. I'm not sure that they liked the planet poem. They were just glad madmen like me exist....